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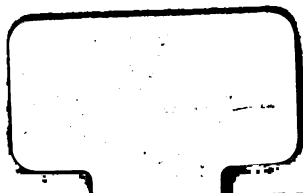








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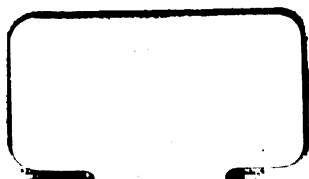




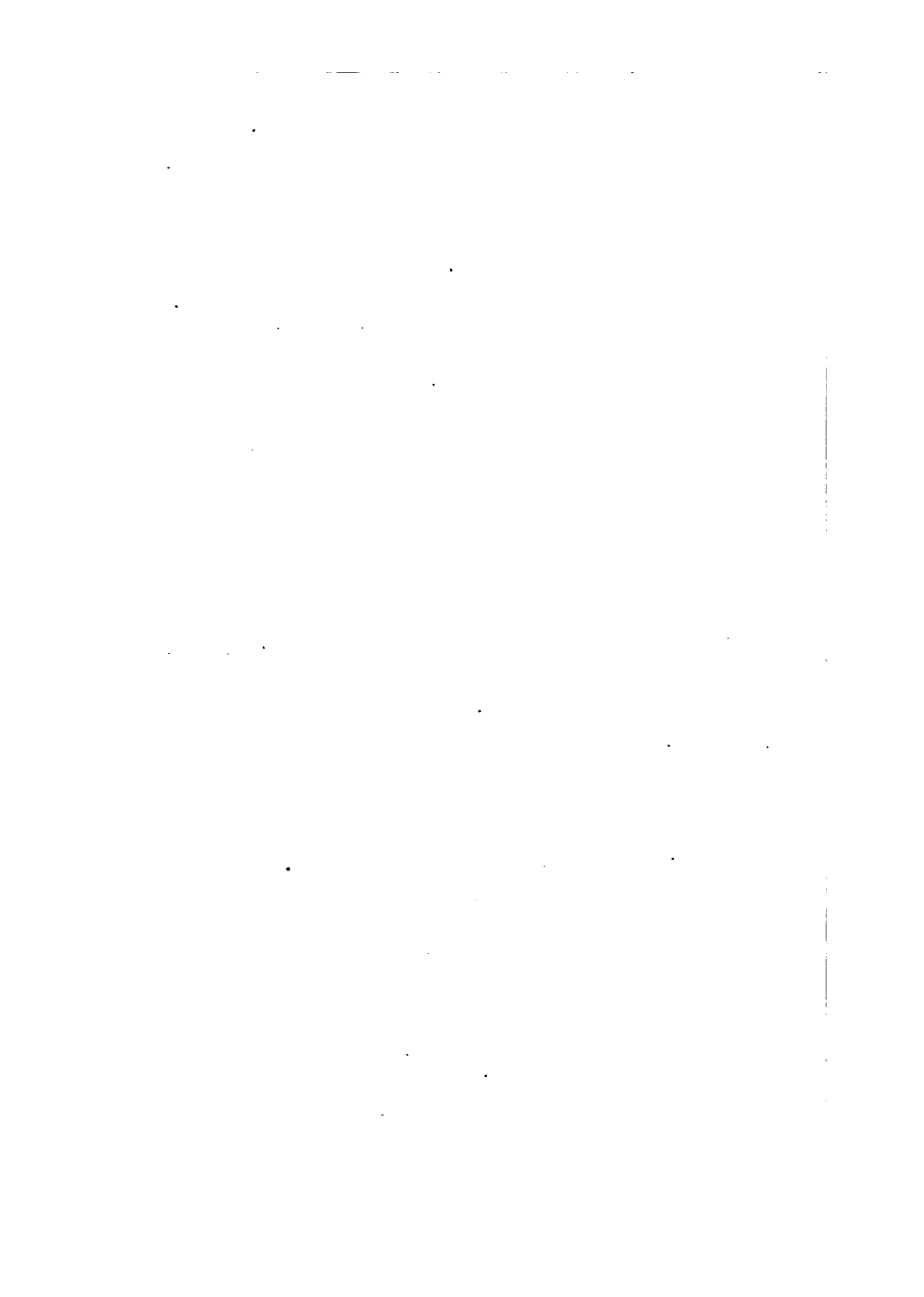




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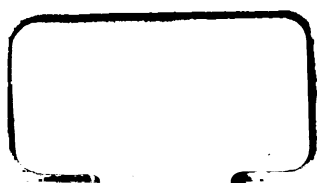




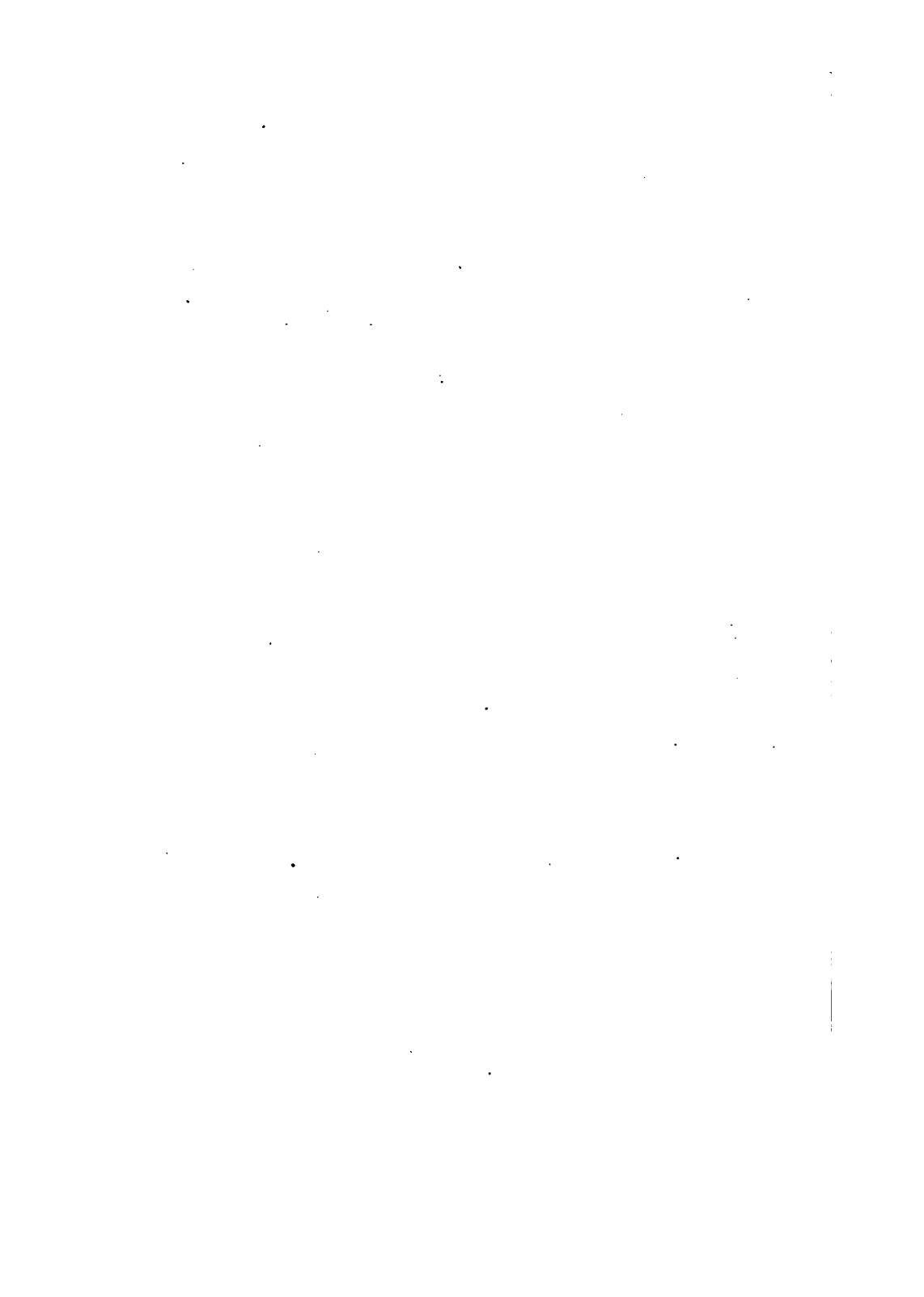




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# POPPLEWAGS.

BY  
CHROME.



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10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

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# POPPEWAGS.



## CHAPTER I.

WE were so dreadfully poor, that we at last unanimously declared, 'something must be done.' Our father's living, or rather 'starving,' of £150 a year, was not sufficient to house, clothe, and feed our parents and four unmarried selves. Vainly had we racked our brains in the attempt to keep the butcher's bill down to five shillings a week, and the grocer's to the like sum. Vainly had we absorbed ourselves in such works as 'How I Kept House Comfortably on £80 a Year,' 'Comfort for Poor Housekeepers,' and the like. We had exhausted our ingenuity in the concoction of artfully imagined dishes, wherein flour and browning and vegetables



were cunningly contrived so as to convey a meaty impression. Our poor father, coming in ravenously hungry from his ministerial tramps, would gaze ruefully at the compound on his plate, and chase with his fork any substance that bore a resemblance to meat, and say nothing, unless it might be, 'A very nice dish, dears,' in tones of mournful resignation. Our mother's delicate appetite made the want of more abundant food a matter of indifference to her: but she grew thinner and thinner as the weeks went by. We girls were well and strong. For ourselves, we would have preferred to stay at home, and rough it as best we could; but we felt that if we were away, our parents would live in affluence on the £150. And so we decided that 'something must be done.' But what?

I, Lucy, the eldest of the little band of paupers, had to give my opinion first.

'The first thing to be considered,' I began, 'is, what "spear of action" (as old Martha would say) lies open to us. What "spears," I should have said.'

'We want four "spears,"' said Georgie, my next sister, a merry, rollicking lass of



eighteen, with a round, good-tempered face, quick, black eyes, and a boyish manner.

‘Let us look in the newspaper Mrs. Jones sent us, and see what situations are open to ladies,’ suggested quiet, practical Mary, a pale, gentle girl of sixteen.

‘Here it is,’ said Kitty, our little fourteen-year-old.

I proceeded to glance down the column of ‘wanted,’ reading an advertisement here and there.

‘Now, Mary, you are the sensible one,’ I said. ‘Which of these advertisements do you think most likely to suit us?’

‘The only four that seem likely are, “Companion to a lady,” “Nursery-governess,” “Pupil teacher,” and—’ she hesitated, ‘perhaps governess. But do we know enough to be able to teach?’

‘I,’ broke in Georgie, ‘would like to marry a nobleman with £10,000 a year, and be Lady something or other, and have you all to live with me. Oh! wouldn’t we have dinners! Sirloin of beef with lots of gravy every day, and chickens, and hams, and——’

‘Order! order!’ I commanded. ‘Now, I



am going, for my part, to answer this advertisement for a companion and housekeeper to a lady. "Salary small, but a comfortable home."

'I,' said Georgie, 'will go in for the nursery-governess "spear," if nobody else wants it. I like children, and it would be great larks taking them out walking.'

'You will have to correct all your vulgarisms, Georgie,' I said. 'An orthodox parent would be horrified at the idea of her children speaking as you do.'

'All right. From this moment I go in for company manners, mem.'

'I think I will take the governess,' said Mary.

'What is my "spear" to be?' asked Kitty.

'I am afraid you must stay at home for the present, you poor little thing,' I sighed. 'You are so very young.'

'Mightn't I take that place of under-nurse?' pleaded Kitty. 'It is not quite the thing for a lady; but no one would know, and I am so fond of babies. Or, what about the "pupil teacher?"'

But, not to spin out this tale, it is enough



to say that we answered the four advertisements, and within a week Georgie and I received replies to our letters. In Georgie's case, the answer was to the effect, that if she were able to give satisfactory references, and did not object to so low a salary as £14 a year (as she had not been out before), she might come into the situation in a week. In mine, before negotiating further, a personal interview was requested, and the day and hour named.

Nothing now remained but to impart the news to our parents. My mother smiled sadly, and said, with no future provided for us, she could offer no opposition to our plan of seeking our fortunes; but our father was dreadfully taken aback, till I privately represented to him, that if we were able to maintain ourselves, our mother could have such little comforts as would certainly lengthen her days—in fact, set her up in health. Then, though most unwillingly, he gave in.

Much discussion was there among the quartette as to what should be my attire on the occasion of the forthcoming interview. My poor, almost threadbare garments were



canvassed one by one, and severally condemned. 'Oh for a black silk dress!' I sighed; 'one can't look *very* much amiss in a black silk dress.'

'When I marry my nobleman, I'll give you a black silk dress that will stand on end!' exclaimed Georgie.

'I wish mamma were taller, or I shorter,' I regretfully resumed, 'I could borrow hers.'

'Couldn't it be made longer anyhow?' asked Kitty.

'We *might* be able to manage it somehow,' said Mary; 'let us try.'

So the garment was brought downstairs, and, being put on, was found to extend only so far down as mid-way between my ankles and calves. That would not do, evidently.

'I have it!' exclaimed Georgie; 'lengthen the top part with anything, and wear your black and white print polonaise over. It will look grand!'

So we all set to work, and so transmogrified the garment that it really looked quite presentable.

'If you get this place, we can all stitch



away at a dress for you, Lucy,' said Georgie; 'something grey or black, I suppose?'

'Shall I wear a bonnet, or a hat?' I asked, with a world of anxious consideration.

'A bonnet,' replied Mary. 'There is so much dignity about a bonnet.'

'I'll wear mamma's, then,' I said; 'mine wants doing up.'

Our poor mother had meekly submitted to the apparent destruction of her dress; but when she saw violent hands laid upon her bonnet, her mind misgave her that she might be prevented going to church next Sunday, and that was the only treat she ever had from one year's end to another; and she ventured a feeble remonstrance.

'Now, be large-hearted, do, mother dear,' pleaded Georgie. 'Would you have Lucy's prospects in life marred for the sake of a bonnet?'

So our mother meekly acquiesced, and the bonnet was appropriated.

Finally the important day arrived. With a beating heart I kissed them all round on the little railway platform, stepped into a second-class carriage, and was soon rushing



along towards the town of B——. Arrived there, I found, on inquiry, that Mrs. Bodkin lived on the outskirts. To save cab hire, I walked to her house, which I had very little trouble in finding. It stood in a lane, and had a small sweep in front, with two gates. Another house, not so large, stood close to it. I entered, and walking up to the door, rang the bell.

‘Yes, missis is in,’ said a person, apparently a maid-of-all-work. ‘What do you want with her?’

‘Mrs. Bodkin expects me. Be good enough to show me in,’ I replied with extreme dignity. About this period I became distinctly conscious that some of Georgie’s sewing had given way, and that the ‘upper’ of my skirt was slowly separating from the ‘under.’

I was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Bodkin. My heart sank. She was an old—a very old lady, of most unprepossessing appearance, with a hawk-like face, and a figure very much bent. She had piercing eyes, with which she seemed to *naïl* me.

‘Um—um—so you are the young woman,



eh? How old did you say?' she asked, in a sharp, almost piercingly sharp, voice. 'Twenty? 'Um—'um. Engaged, eh?—No? I dare say you are, only you won't tell! Ah ha!'

What a witch-like old creature she was, I thought.

'You'll see no young men here! No followers allowed! Don't care for them? Oh! ah! Don't tell me!'

Nasty old woman! I began to loathe her; but I thought of the poor, dear, starving people at home, and resolved to hold on to my intention. So I went through a course of catechising, the result of which was, that I was engaged to come that day fortnight at a salary of £18 a year. My duties were to be varied and extensive. To keep and give out all the stores, to give orders to the tradespeople, to read aloud to the old lady, to go out with her, to superintend the maid-of-all-work and the boy; were a few of my duties. However, still remembering the poor dear paupers at home, I accepted the terms, and promised to come.

It required much fencing and considerable



elasticity of conscience to answer the eager questions of my family, whom I managed to delude into the supposition that I was going into a charming house, where I should be treated like a daughter. It was better they should think it, poor things. It made it no worse for me, and kept them happy.



## CHAPTER II.

At last the day came. I hurried through the farewells, started on my journey, arrived safely at the town of B——, and proceeding to Grove House—this time in a fly—was soon installed in my new domicile.

Oh, that Gehenna of a house! Oh, that fiend of an old lady! For she really *was* a *very* wicked old lady. Yes, in spite of all, I must record that conviction. I don't think a more wicked old lady ever lived than she was at that time.

On going to my room that night (it adjoined hers, and was entered only through that apartment), I felt so thoroughly downhearted, I yearned so for my dear, dear people at home, that when I knelt beside my bed, the



tears streamed in torrents down my cheeks, and I could only whisper the entreaty, 'Oh, let me be taken away from here! Let something happen to take me back to them!' And then, hating myself for my want of self-denial, I took a solemn vow to stay in that dreadful house, come what might, for three months, at all events; unless, indeed, some most unforeseen circumstance, with which I had nothing to do, should happen to take me away.

I was woke out of my first sleep by a sound of groaning. I sat up in bed, and listened. The old lady was talking and groaning by turns.

'Oh! mis'erable old woman that I am!  
O—h! o—h!'

I wondered whether she was ill, and whether I ought to go into her room. But after a while she became quiet; so then I fell asleep, and slept till the morning.

I was awoke by a sharp rapping on my door. Opening it, I beheld Mrs. Bodkin in her dressing-gown, looking, in that garment, more witch-like than she had done the evening before.



‘What sort of a day is it?’ she asked.

‘A beautiful day,’ I replied.

‘Ah! you’ve some motive for saying it,’ she cried. ‘You want to go out and meet that young man. But you shan’t! I’m not going out to-day. Ah ha!’

I made no reply, except to ask whether I could do anything for her.

‘Of course! of course!’ she answered. ‘Make haste and dress yourself, and go downstairs, and see what that hussy of a girl is doing. And bring me my hot water, and dress and brush my hair. And then you’ll see if all the cats are in the house—there are four of them—and then bring me their breakfast, to see if it is good. And then get breakfast ready for me and you. And then go to the stable and see if that devil of a boy is doing his work, and whether he has been killed by the donkey—I should like him to be, the impudent, lazy young rascal! Expect he will be, some day, and serve him right—serve him right!’

I dressed as quickly as possible, went downstairs, and found Nancy reading a novel instead of doing her work; so I took it from



her, set her about her work, took up the old lady's hot water, and helped her to dress. Then down I went again, called over the muster-roll of four cats, of whom two were absent, and then, receiving two soup-plates filled with an evil-smelling compound from the hands of Nancy, carried them upstairs for Mrs. Bodkin's inspection.

'Am I to feed them?' I asked.

'Can I trust you?'

'Yes; I am fond of animals.'

'Um! 'um! Fonder of young men, I fancy!'

'Two of the cats are out. Had I not better keep back one of the plates for them?'

'Yes. Now, that's a good girl!' exclaimed Mrs. Bodkin, with a hideous grin of approbation that sat strangely upon her. 'Yes, perhaps you are a good girl after all, and don't care so very much about that young man.'

'There is no young man,' I said (sighing in my heart to think that there wasn't—no dim, distant chance of escape from this purgatory). 'But I will feed the poor things. They were mewling as if they were hungry.'



After attending to the wants of the two cats, whom I liked—they were so very much nicer than their mistress!—I prepared the breakfast, and went to summon Mrs. Bodkin, whom I found reading a chapter in the Bible; she did every morning, and seemed to fancy it a set-off against the rest of the day's shortcomings. Also, she was given to quoting—or rather misquoting—such passages from the same as suited her purpose.

The old lady was fond of creature-comforts, and lived well. How I wished my poor father and mother and the girls could have partaken of that breakfast! I pictured them to myself sipping the weak tea, dipping their toast into it to save the butter, and pretending to prefer it, and to think butter indigestible; going without sugar, and professing they did so 'because it is bad for the teeth. Had it not been for the dreadful drawback of Mrs. Bodkin's presence, the thought of my poor starving relatives would have marred my enjoyment of hot rolls, new-laid eggs, muffins, cool fresh butter, and delicious tea; but so great was my repugnance to the dreadful old lady, that I would gladly have



exchanged my present quarters, with all their attendant advantages, for my dear home, with my beloved people, and semi-starvation; and so I felt no guilt in eating, and enjoying it.

‘I wonder if you’ll get spoilt, and tell me to suit myself, as they all do when they’ve been here a week?’ mused the dreadful old person, contemplating me like a wicked old bird, with her head on one side, as if I were a sort of abstraction. As the remark was evidently not addressed to me in particular, I made no reply. She went on.

‘She’s no beauty; but the ugly ones are more after the men than the pretty ones, I always think.’

Not knowing to whom she alluded, I remained silent.

‘What are you thinking about?’ she sharply asked, unclosing her mouth with a hard snap, and then banging it to again, like the lid of a box.

‘Of nothing particular.’

‘You are thinking of that young man.’

‘No.’

‘Don’t contradict me.’



I began to perceive that Mrs. Bodkin was a bully, and must be resisted. It never does to give in to a bully ; so I answered :

‘I must, if you say anything about me that I know to be untrue.’

‘Do you say that I tell lies?’

‘No ; but in this instance you are mistaken.’

‘Aren’t you afraid to speak so to me?’

‘No.’

‘What? Aren’t you afraid of me?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘You *will* be some day. They all get afraid of me at last.’

‘I *never* shall. I have never been afraid of any one, and I shall never be.’

Instead of getting into a violent passion, Mrs. Bodkin, to my astonishment, burst into a peal of cackling, cracking laughter, which reminded me of weak thunder. ‘I like you!’ she exclaimed.

I was sorry I could not return the compliment. She went on :

‘I like to see pluck. Now, the last thing that was here was a mean-spirited wretch. If I flung a plate or a knife at her, she would begin to blubber.’



‘She ought to have knocked you down.’

‘Would you do so?’

‘Certainly.’

The old lady went off into such a volley of cackles at my reply, that a crumb went the wrong way, and she choked for some time, till I sent the crumb the right way by thumping her violently on the back, and forcing her to gulp down some tea. Then I gave her a good shake, to make sure the crumb wouldn’t come back again, settled her cap on her head, and asked how she felt.

‘Oh, I’m all right now. But my! what a strong fist you must have!’ she ejaculated, in allusion to the thumps.

‘Very,’ I dryly answered. ‘Well, if we have both finished breakfast, shall I go and look after the boy?’

‘Yes; but though you are no fool, I don’t suppose you know anything about stable-work?’

‘Yes, I do—all about it.’

‘Do you? Then if I dismiss that brat of a boy, and give you two pounds a year extra, will you do the stable-work?’

‘No.’



‘Will you do it for three?’

‘No.’

‘Four? Five?’

‘No.’

‘What will you take to do it? Five pounds is a great deal of money—a deal of money!’

‘I won’t do it for anything you may offer.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it is not the work for a gentleman. It is not woman’s work.’

‘Oh! ho! And are *you* a gentlewoman?’

‘Yes.’

She seemed too utterly astonished at my reply to answer it. I asked whether she would like me to go to the stable at once.

‘But what will you do when you get there?’ she asked.

‘First, see whether the stall—or stalls—are cleanly swept and sanded; the stable floor the same. Next, examine the harness; then the carriage, or car. Lastly, I shall see if the donkey has been properly cleaned, and I shall lift his feet, to see if they have been washed and dried.’

‘My! How did you learn all that?’



‘When my father had been ill, and was unable to walk his accustomed rounds, a neighbour lent us a little car and a donkey. We had a little stable, and as we could not afford to pay a groom, my sister Georgie took the trouble to learn all about stable-work. She groomed the donkey; my little sister, Kitty, washed the car; Mary and I did the harness.’

‘I thought you said it was not *ladies*’ work. Ah ha! I’ve caught you there!’ chuckled the odious old woman.

‘We did it for our *father*, which made all the difference.’

‘Is your father a country pill-box?’

‘No; a country clergyman.’

‘I suppose you doat on parsons?’

‘Not at all.’

‘You think them humbugs?’

‘Not more so than other people. But I will go to the stable now.’

‘I’ll come with you to show you the way.’

Mrs. Bodkin took me through a door at the end of the hall, into the garden, which was separated from her neighbour’s domain by a low wall, standing about breast high.



As we walked along, she picked a snail off the wall on our side, and flung it over to the other side; then another, then another, till she must have contributed a dozen able-bodied devourers of her neighbour's flowers and vegetables. All the while she was chuckling with fiendish delight.

'They'd break their hearts if they knew of it!' she said.

'Who would?' I asked.

'They,' she replied, wagging her head at the next house. 'They're as poor as Job, and live mostly on vegetables, and as for flowers, they slave at 'em day and night, bless you!'

'Who are they?'

'Four of 'em; all old maids; all of 'em ugly; all of 'em skinny; all of 'em beggars.'

'Why do you dislike them?'

'I had a creature here that suited me. I had got her that poor spirited that she'd fly to do whatever I told her. She did her work like a machine—it was never wrong, bless you! She was that crushed, that she dursn't think anyway but as I told her. And these brimstone beggars, when she got



ill, came in to see her and took her into their own house, and nursed and fed her, and cured her, and got her a situation, where she is now ; and I have never been well-suited since. They did it to spite me—all to spite me !

‘ But why ?’

‘ Oh ! because I’m rich ; only that, mind you ! They’re jealous, that’s it ! But I’m even to them. I know all sorts of ways of plaguing ’em, and I do it !—I do it, bless you !’



## CHAPTER III.

WHILE thus fulminating, she had paused. In conclusion, she shook her fist at the neighbouring territory, and espying another snail, flung it over as a parting malison. Then she resumed her way towards the stable, which we soon reached.

On entering, I beheld a very small, puny, decrepit-looking youth, of about twelve apparently, standing—evidently at bay—with a brush in one hand and a cloth in the other. A donkey, of decidedly determined—not to say ferocious—aspect, stood in front of him, its ears back upon its neck, the whites of its eyes showing in an unpleasantly suggestive manner. As we advanced, the unhappy youth made an attempt to bolt past the donkey, which



attempt that person frustrated by seizing the fugitive by the seat of his nether garments, and holding on. A howl from the sufferer made me spring forward and drag him from the jaws of his assailant, in whose teeth, however, the said portion of his clothing remained. The brute, thus circumvented, turned swiftly round, and lashed out with his heels so quickly that I had only just time to save myself.

Mrs. Bodkin, who had discreetly remained at the door, screamed with elfish glee at the scene. The boy's terror was delightful to her.

'Oh, bissis! bissis!' he piteously wailed. *Don't 'ee, don't 'ee* bake be groob hib doe bore! *Do 'ee* send be back to the work'us—do 'ee!

'Oh! the brimstone ingratitude of the poor!' ejaculated Mrs. Bodkin, lifting hands and eyes. 'Oh! the *blue* brimstone ingratitude!'

I made no answer. I was considering what should be done to reduce this recalcitrant quadruped to subjection.

The old lady went on :



‘Yes, the *blue* brimstone ingratitude !  
Here’s this boy—look at him !’

As I had already done so, and had not found the spectacle sufficiently tempting to invite a second inspection, I disregarded the mandate.

‘Look at him ! Of all the low, braggaty, spiffety, woppleing, mean—there !’

And seizing the unhappy youth by the scruff of his neck, she shook him till she nearly fell over. Here I interposed.

‘I think you have punished him enough,’ I said. ‘If you leave him to me, I will show him how to manage the donkey.’

‘Oh, *doe* !’ sobbed the unhappy little wretch, who evidently had a dreadful cold in the head. ‘I doad wadt to ’ave doe bore to do with the dodkey. I wadt to go bag to the worg’ouse.’ (Sniff.)

‘Did any one ever hear the like of that ? Oh ! you little brazen-nosed brat ! Aren’t you an orphan ? Didn’t I take you away from the workhouse, where you were a pauper—a pauper *orphan*—and bring you here, where you live in comfort and plenty ?’

‘I doad wadt doe cobfort and plenty. I



wadt to be a bauper orfad agaid !' wailed the victim.

'Joey Jarley, you will come to the gallows!' was Mrs. Bodkin's solemn commentary.

'I wadt to cub to the gallows, I do! I doad wadt to groob the dodkey! Doe; I wadt to go back to the 'ouse!' sobbed Joey.

'Now, you mustn't be afraid of the donkey, Joey. I'm not afraid of him,' I remonstrated, telling a cheerful fib; for I was horribly afraid. 'Let us see if we can't manage him between us. I'll take care you shan't get hurt.'

'Loog oud! 'E bites, 'e do!' said Joey, keeping well behind me, as I cautiously advanced, with a little hay in my hand.

'There,' I began, in calmly soothing accents. 'Good fellow! good old boy!'

The 'good old boy' stood quietly, trying to appear amiably unconscious of my presence. I approached with the hay. He appeared blandly pleased with the attention; but the exhibition of an undue amount of white in his eyes, accompanied by a depres-



sion of his ears on to his neck, warned us to, as Joey said, 'look out.' Consequently, when he snatched the hay from my hand, and then caught my sleeve in his teeth (meaning it to be my arm), I sprang aside, and so escaped, at the cost of a torn sleeve only.

The old lady went off into crackling peals of laughter. I stopped to consider. Then I filled a pail with oats—an irresistible attraction to a donkey. This I placed on the ground, exactly under the spot where a rope with a halter at the end dangled from a large iron hook fixed in a beam. The donkey plunged his head into the pail of oats. I cautiously crept round him, and, in a trice (having been used to the work), slipped the halter over his head. Then I tightened it up to the nook. Vainly did he tug, and rear, and try to get at me with his heels. He was a prisoner. Then I found a stick, and gave him a sound drubbing therewith.

'Now,' I said, 'no food for him till he is good. We will go away, and leave him to get hungry.'

'E aid't 'ad doe food for two hours,' said Joey.



‘Very well,’ I said; ‘and he won’t have any for some time.’

Mrs. Bodkin had ceased to cackle, and stood regarding me with apparently reverential awe.

‘You’re a *devil*!’ she exclaimed, in accents of undisguised admiration.

‘Yes, when necessary,’ I coolly replied. ‘I never give in, you know!’

All the while my heart was thumping as if it would burst through my side.

‘Let us come in now, and feed the cats,’ I continued.

So we left the stable, and filed off up the garden in a procession of three.

‘I’ll be bound that dratted girl hasn’t saved the food for the other two!’ said Mrs. Bodkin, preparing for an onslaught on her domestic. However, her anticipations proved incorrect; the food *was* saved, but no cats were in the kitchen.

‘You brimstone baggage!’ she cried, fiercely shaking her walking-stick at the drudge; ‘you’ve driven ’em out, I know!’

‘No, mum, indeed.’

‘Don’t tell me a pack of lies now. Well,’



addressing me, 'I'll teach you the call that brings 'em.' So saying, she put her hands to her mouth, and shrieked, in a fearfully weird way, 'Aho—y—y ! aho—y—y ! aho—y—y !'

In a moment or two, a line of cats came tearing in, each with its tail bolt upright, each seeming in a desperate hurry, as though he hadn't a minute to lose.

'Two has bin fed,' said the 'help.'

'Well, and mayn't they be hungry again, you fool?' was the polite rejoinder. 'Now, Miss Popplewags, I'll tell you their names, so that you'll know 'em again.'

My name was Seymour. Through what association of ideas she corrupted it into Popplewags I know not. Possibly the unfortunate, young person who calmly endured being pelted with plates may have rejoiced in that cognomen. However, if it pleased Mrs. Bodkin, it didn't hurt me, and I demurred not.

'Now, this cat,' she pursued, introducing a very ugly Tom of a brilliant yellow, 'is "Miss Spraggs." Don't forget the name ; but call *very* loud indeed when he is absent.



Call in the direction of the next garden ; he is often there.'

'Very well.'

'This black one—a very born devil in temper—is "*Lucy*"—Lucy Spraggs, mind.'

'Yes.'

'This dark tabby with fierce eyes is "*Jemima* Spraggs." Don't forget.'

'No.'

'This spotted one is "*Sarah* Spraggs." Sometimes we call him *Sally*.'

'But why do you give feminine names to Tom cats ? And such strange names for cats too !'

'Never mind ; that's *my* affair,' chuckled the old lady, with great apparent zest.

By this time the Spragg family were all engaged in gobbling up the nasty-looking compound prepared for them. When there was no more, Miss Spraggs and Miss Jemima of the fierce eyes made a simultaneous move towards a small trap-door cut out of the back kitchen door. The pair arriving at precisely the same moment of time, and the door being too small to admit the two abreast, it



might have been expected that one of the ladies would have made a graceful curtsy to the other, in token that she was to pass through first. Not so. Miss Jemima immediately shaped herself into the similitude of a half-circle, depressed her ears, turned her head aside in a peculiar manner, and uttered one long howl of defiance. Miss Spraggs, nowise daunted, at once assumed precisely the same attitude as Miss Jemima, and uttered a howl that might have passed as the echo of the other. I saw that a frightful battle was imminent, and was about to separate the combatants, when the old lady interposed.

‘No, no! don’t part ’em? It’s grand to see ’em fight, bless you! It’s quite cheering; keeps me alive, bless you!’

Then followed a contest, as of two wild beasts. Miss Jemima tore Miss Spraggs’s ear; Miss Spraggs returned the compliment by ‘gouging’ Miss Jemima’s eye; Miss Jemima thereupon leapt on Miss Spraggs’s back, rolled her over, and seized her with her teeth, apparently with the view of tearing out her entrails. All the while the dreadful



old woman ceased not to encourage and hound on the belligerents by cries of 'Cook him ! cook him !'

It was so disgusting, that I seized a broomstick, and was about to part them, when Miss Lucy Spraggs—the black one, 'the born devil'—flew upon the combatants, and lashing out at them with great spirit, drove them both out pell-mell through the trap-door. Upon which Mrs. Bodkin went off into shrieks of laughter, till a fit of coughing and choking caused her to subside. I had again to thump her on the back, and set her cap straight upon her head. All the while, Miss Sarah Spraggs had sat quiescently regarding the fray. He now began to arrange his piebald toilette in a solemn, ponderous manner. Miss Sarah was always solemn and ponderous, and of very stately presence.

'Does Sarah Spraggs never fight?' I asked with some interest.

'When Lucy attacks him, he knocks him down—that's all.'

'And when the others attack him?'

'They never do, bless you. Jemima tried it once, and he went on to the wall, and



waited till she passed under, and then dropped himself down on to her.'

'I should not have liked to be Miss Jemima! But how can you bear to see them fight? I thought you were fond of them.'

'Not a bit of it.'

'Why do you keep them?'

'To spite those stuck-up things next door.'

'Don't they like cats?'

'Never asked 'em.'

Inscrutable and fiend-like old lady!

'Well, come along now, and sit up in my room, and do some work that I've got ready.'

'Mustn't I see about the dinner first?'

'No—I know that devil of a girl thinks I'm not coming into the kitchen. So I *am* coming, to disappoint her.'

Amiable and ingenious old person! I followed her upstairs to a small but pleasant room, overlooking part of the garden, and also the adjoining one. Here she produced some striped gingham and a servant-boy's morning jacket.

'Now, you cut out one exactly the size of this, will you?'



‘Yes. But surely this is very small, if it is meant to fit your present boy.’

‘Never you mind! He says it’s too tight—cuts his arms—makes his shoulders ache—a parcel of fidgets! I’ll bring down his pride, I promise you!’

‘But why not make it a little larger?’

‘That would be giving in to him. You just do as I tell you! Now I’m going downstairs. Just keep an eye upon next door, and if you see one of the cats there, call to him very loud—by his name, you know—by his name.’

‘Very well.’

I set to work to cut out the jacket, taking care to cut it a good three inches larger, and resolved to fight it out with the horrid old woman if she discovered the delusion. That done, I drew my chair to the open window, with a big heart-ache, and began my work.

What a sad, sad world it was, I thought, and how unequally and unjustly everything seemed to be managed. Here was this dreadful old woman, allowed to live on in her wickedness, revelling in every comfort, having delicious and unlimited breakfasts.



and dinners every day of her life ; while my dear, good, loving, genial-hearted people were steeped to the very lips in poverty. This old woman's one thought was, to make every one around her wretched ; theirs, was to cheer and gladden themselves and all who knew them. Why, why was she so favoured, and they so shabbily treated ? Oh ! it was shameful—shameful, I thought.

I set to work with a kind of ferocious energy, of which I was unconscious, till the sound of a cough in the next garden made me look up and turn my eyes in that direction. There I saw four ladies, all of them tall, all thin, all past the heyday of life, all unmistakably gentlewomen. One of them walked between two others, and leant upon their arms, the fourth carried a folding-chair, and some warm wraps. Evidently the one who leant upon the others was an invalid.

The chair was placed in a sheltered spot, near a sunny wall. Soft cushions were arranged against the back, and on the seat ; and a large warm shawl was thrown over it. Then the invalid sank down, and with soft, meek grace, submitted to all the countless



little cares that were showered upon her. One placed her feet gently upon a footstool ; another spread a shawl over them ; a third disappeared for a moment, and then returned with a little table, which she placed beside the chair. Then a book was laid upon it, and then a work-basket.

The invalid spoke, in a soft, sweet, cultured voice :

‘So comfortable ! Now go, dears ; you have plenty to do, and I shall not want anything.’

One kissed her, and went into the house ; another soon followed ; but the third lingered yet.

‘Perhaps I shall sleep a little if you go, dear,’ said the invalid.

‘Then I had better go,’ assented the other.

‘You will ring if you want me, darling ?’

‘Yes ; but I shall sleep, I think.’

So the other lady went away, slowly and lingeringly, often looking back to nod and smile ; and stopping to listen, after she had turned the corner of the house, where I could still see her, though the invalid could not.

Then the sick lady leant her head back,



and crossed her long, white, thin hands over her breast, and gazed dreamily forward with her large blue eyes. I thought I had no business to watch her, as she fancied herself alone, so I pushed my chair back behind the curtain, and resolutely resumed my stitching.

But my thoughts could not be turned away from the scene in the garden ; so, after a while, I peeped forth and saw that the lady had fallen asleep. Her head was turned a little aside, her thin white hands were still clasped upon her breast, a little flush was upon each cheek.

I saw one of the other ladies creep softly round the corner of the house, and approach the sleeper. Then she smiled with satisfaction, nodded pleasantly to herself, and withdrew.

Again I resumed stitching. It was very pleasant to be sitting there, that balmy June day. The air was softly and stilly warm, and faintly stirred the leaves of the elms and beeches which shadowed a portion of the garden, and afforded a grateful shelter to many feathered songsters. One blackbird sang so sweetly that it reminded me of our



garden at home, and of how we all sat at the open window together in the summer evenings, year after year, listening to the blackbirds and thrushes while we worked ; how we had planned our future lives together, the finale of all being, that we were each to marry, and to settle in four houses near to each other ; and the dear pater and mater were to live by turns with their daughters—a quarter of a year with each. And we were to have a sirloin of beef and roast chickens for dinner every day, besides other delicacies, not to mention buttered toast and crumpets *ad libitum*, and apple tart made with butter paste till we were tired of it ! Then there was to be a pony-carriage for our dear mother, and a nice quiet cob for the good pater.



## CHAPTER IV.

‘HIGHTY-TIGHTY! What? crying already!’

Such were the sounds that fell upon my startled ears, shattering all my airy castles, drowning the song of the dear blackbird, making me start out of my reverie, and bringing me rudely back from the happy past and hopeful future, to the dreadful present, to life in this Gehenna of a house, with this Gehenna of an old woman.

‘So your fine spirit was just a make-believe—a sham—was it, eh? And you are a poor, pitiful creature after all!’

I saw that I had lost ground. Gulping down my tears, and the large pill which apparently stuck in my throat, I stammered something about ‘weak eyes,’ etc.



‘Um—um—perhaps. Well, how much have you done? I allow no idling here!’

I saw that she had been bullying her poor drudge till she had thoroughly got into the bullying vein, and, if not checked, would bully every living thing she encountered; so I replied:

‘I have never been accustomed to submit to censure unless it was deserved. You have no right to speak to me thus.’

I looked at her with a full, long, determined gaze, which had its effect. She moderated her tone.

‘Oh, well, you needn’t look so fierce. Only, I thought you were crying, bless you.’

‘Crying? What should I cry for?’

‘At being here—away from the pill-box.’

‘I will not have you call my father a pill-box. He is not a doctor. He is a clergyman.’

‘Well, well, what does it matter?’

‘It matters very much. Things should be called by their right names.’

‘I didn’t think you had such a temper.’

‘Didn’t you? Ah! wait till I am *really* angry—*very* angry. Even now, I am a *little*



angry, and *must* do something for relief. There !'

So saying, I took up a tumbler, a common thing, I knew, and, dashing it to the floor, broke it into several pieces.

'There !' I exclaimed, with a contented sigh ; 'now I am better. But please don't provoke me again.'

'Why, you are a born devil !' gasped Mrs. Bodkin.

'Yes ; you never asked anything about my temper when you engaged me, or I should have told you. You only made inquiries about honesty and respectability. I am honest ; I am respectable ; but I *have* a temper of my own.'

'What would you do if I provoked you *very* much ?'

'Well, I *might* break a tumbler on your head instead of on the floor. Or I *might* throw a knife at you if one were handy. I wouldn't answer for myself, you know. But, as long as I am well treated, you will find me pleasant enough.'

'Well, I like you. You are one of the go-ahead sort.'



But I saw the old lady was afraid of me. However, a diversion occurred. Chancing to look out of the window, she espied the poor sick lady asleep in the garden. In a moment she raised a sharp, shrill cry of 'Miss Spraggs! Miss Spraggs! Puss! Cat!'

'Oh, hush!' I exclaimed. 'There is no cat there. Oh! the poor sick woman! She was sleeping so sweetly, and you have woke her.'

For the sleeper had woke with a start, and had clasped her hands upon her side, and now struggled with a painful fit of coughing. As soon as she was able she rang her hand-bell, and the lady who had lingered longest with her came quickly round the corner of the house.

Mrs. Bodkin retreated behind the window-curtain, laughing fiendishly.

'Tired of sitting up, dear?' asked the sister, with a world of tenderest love in her voice. 'Come in, then.'

'I think I had a dream,' said the invalid, speaking very low and faint. 'Something woke me with a fright.'



‘Did it, dear? There, there, then!’ soothingly. ‘Oh, my darling! my darling!’ she sighed.

It struck me that the poor sufferer was yet weaker than she had been an hour before. Her sister raised her slowly and tenderly from the chair, and, throwing an arm around her, supported her along the path, till they turned the corner of the house, and I saw them no more.

‘Now, to see the way that creature goes on, you’d think she was dying!’ said Mrs. Bodkin.

‘So she is,’ I answered, in a low voice. I felt a terrible heart-ache; that rebellious pill was rising in my throat and choking me.

‘Not a bit of it; it’s all affectation. That woman will live to a hundred; all those thin, wiry women do. I’ve no patience with her airs and graces. If she were ill, she’d lie in bed; she wouldn’t come out into the garden to show off—and this side too! Why does not she go the other side of the house?’

‘Because it is in the shade.’

‘Ah! bah! I’ve no patience with the



fandangalous, spediflicous, frittinger — go along, do !

I never could imagine whence Mrs. Bodkin got her extraordinary expressions. When excited, she used words that I have never heard from any one else, either before or since, and never could find in any lexicon ; and she generally concluded her sentence with, ' Go along ! ' or ' Get out with you ! ' or some such exhortation, not necessarily applicable to the person she addressed, but often, as in the present instance, bearing reference to the absent.

' Perhaps I may as well go and feed the donkey now,' I said, rising and putting away my work, so that she should not examine it. ' I suppose I can take the boy with me ? '

' Yes ; and mind you *make* him groom it ! '

' I will see about that.'

' I call the donkey " Bel," you know — short for " Beelzebub." He's a vicious devil. He's bitten the boy three times, and kicked him twice. Serve him right, the young rascal ! '

I found my way to the kitchen, and captured the said youth, and we proceeded to-



gether to the stable. There we found the prisoner just as we had left him. He snorted loudly as we entered.

'Thad's 'cos 'e wadts 'is grub. 'E do always bake thad 'ere doise when 'e's beckish,' exclaimed Joey.

'Very well; if he is good he shall have it,' I replied, quietly arming myself with a handful of hay, and approaching Beelzebub, who still snorted in the same 'beckish' manner.

Quietly slackening the rope, but not letting it leave the hook, I approached, holding out the hay in token of amity. Then I ventured to gently stroke his neck, then I patted him; then I offered the hay, and while he ate it I let my arm steal across his neck. The hay gone, I bade Joey bring me some corn in a pail. This I held for the famished Beelzebub to eat from, loosing the cord by degrees. My next step was to retreat a few paces with the food. Bel followed, I holding the cord close up to the halter. Bel made no attempt at kicking or biting; but, having quietly finished his corn, allowed me to lead him into his stall and put up his bars. Then I slipped off his halter and left him.



‘By!’ said Joey (meaning ‘My!’).

‘I should have liked to groom him,’ I said, ‘but that wouldn’t do just after feeding him.’

‘I dever groob ’ib,’ said Joey.

‘Then that is very wrong, Joey,’ I gravely rejoined. ‘Your mistress pays you for doing it, and you ought not to deceive her.’

‘I *dever* groob ’ib,’ he reiterated, ‘dor you wod’t deither. ’E wod’t led you groob ’ib!’

‘Yes, he will,’ I replied. ‘But come away now, and do your work in the house. And do blow your nose!’

‘Bissis is a hold devil, she is,’ remarked Joey.

‘I cannot hear you speak in this way of your mistress, Joey. You eat her food and take her wages, and have no right to speak against her.’

‘Dod’t you tell her, biss,’ implored Joey, in accents of terror. ‘If you do, she’ll pull by dose!’

‘No, I won’t tell her, Joey,’ I said.

By this time we had reached the house, where a fray was going on. Mrs. Bodkin was storming at the drudge, and had pinned her into a corner.



‘You brimstone hussy! You base, malingerer, bewalgering——’

‘What is the matter?’ I asked.

‘Matter, indeed? Matter enough! Look here, Miss Popplewags! Here’s this miserable workhouse brat—(oh! you *blue* brimstone!’ aside, with a vindictive shake of the fist)—‘a creature without a friend in the world—without father or mother——’

‘But what has she done?’ I asked, regarding with utter compassion the poor, shrinking specimen of humanity in the corner.

‘She’s eaten up the cat’s sop!’ was the rejoinder.

‘No, ma’am—no, miss, indeed!’ pleaded the girl.

‘A lie! Take that for telling a lie!’ screamed Mrs. Bodkin, administering a cuff.

I could not stand that. I placed myself between the girl and her mistress, and said:

‘I cannot allow this!’

‘Highly-tighty! And who are you, to come between me and my property?’

‘She is not your property; but even if she were—even if she were your slave—I would not allow you to strike her!’



‘I’ll strike you, if you don’t mind!’

‘I don’t think you will.’

For all reply, the old lady flew at me like a tiger—flew straight at my throat. I caught her by the wrists, pinioned her arms down to her sides, and then shook her till she was out of breath. This done, I deposited her in a chair.

During this little passage of arms, Joey had leaped about in transports of delight, crying out:

‘Go id, Biss Bobblewags! Go id!’

But the poor servant girl stood, white as a sheet, her hands clasped in an agony of terror.

‘There!’ said I, addressing Mrs. Bodkin.

‘I have been gentle this time; but I won’t promise to be so again. Didn’t I tell you that I had a temper?’

‘You are a devil!—a *strong* devil!—a *very* strong devil!’—gasped the bewildered old lady.

‘Now, Mrs. Bodkin,’ I resumed, ‘if you leave these two servants with me, I will make them do their work, and punish them well if they don’t do it.’



‘Will you? The young baggages! Well, you can punish ’em much worse than I can. Yes, if you only shake ’em as you’ve shook me, they’ll wish themselves back under me again! But aren’t you afraid I’ll send you away?’

‘Not at all. I mean to stay here as long as it suits me.’

‘Ha! ha! ha! You are a plucky one! I like you. Well, I’m going.’

When she was gone, the girl fell upon her knees before me, and clasped my dress in her arms.

‘Oh! *do* be kind to me! *Don’t* let her beat me!’ she sobbed.

‘But you shouldn’t have eaten the sop,’ I remonstrated.

‘I didn’t! I didn’t! It was poor Joey.’

‘Why didn’t you tell Mrs. Bodkin it was Joey?’ I asked.

‘Because she would have beaten him cruel; and Joey is that poor sperrited.’

‘Joey,’ I said, sternly addressing the ‘poor-sperrited’ orphan, ‘you ought to have told Mrs. Bodkin. It was mean and cowardly of



you to allow Nancy to be punished for your fault.'

'She would 'a wobbled me, she would.'

'If you don't mind, I'll wop you!' I said, regarding with some repulsion the unprepossessing orphan.

'Oh doe!' pleaded Joey.

'He's only a poor-sperrited cretur,' pleaded Nancy.

'Well,' I cheerfully returned, 'now let us all set to work.'

And so we did. The breakfast things were washed, pots and pans cleaned and burnished, and everything set in trim. Leaving the orphans enough work to occupy them for some time, I rejoined the old lady in the breakfast-room, and asked what she would like me to do next.

'Can you take part in a duet?' she asked.

On my replying in the affirmative, she hobbled along to the piano, and, opening it, placed upon it a heavy music-book, evidently of very ancient date. Then she threw up the window.

'I like something cheerful and noisy,' she



observed. 'I'll take the bass. Now, mind, play as loud as you can.'

It was the 'Battle of Prague.' I did my best to play loud; but the old lady played louder. I played louder still; so did she. Thump! bang! crash! crash! thump! bang! The real battle could not have made much more noise, it seemed to me.

'There!' exclaimed Mrs. Bodkin, when the performance had concluded with a final volley of crashes. 'You don't know many people who can play as I do.'

'No, indeed,' I replied, 'especially old ladies.'

'Old, indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Bodkin. 'Not so old either! How old do you take me for?'

Feeling that I was on dangerous ground, I replied that I had formed no opinion on the subject; that appearances were so deceitful; that people would sometimes look ten years older than they did at other times; that Ninon de L'Enclos was young and beautiful at ninety. She was mollified.

'I have a nephew,' she pursued, 'who thinks I am too old to live much longer. I



shall live as long as I can, to spite him ! I hate him ! He thinks I shall leave him all my money ; but I *shan't*. No, I'd rather fling it into the sea. Ah ! there's the melan-jering fool coming into the garden to show off her airs and graces. Stop till she's settled, and we'll play the " Battle of Prague " again.'

' To disturb her ?'

' Yes, and drive her into the house again. I hate the sight of the fliggittering thing !'

The lady looked still more fragile than she had done before. Her step was slower and more uncertain. Her sisters tended her with yet more anxious care. When they had settled her comfortably in her accustomed place, they brought some garden tools, and began to busy themselves with gardening. She looked on with a pleased but languid smile. By degrees her head went back, and she closed her eyes.

' She's asleep—the lazy, humbugging thing ! See if I don't wake her ! Come and play the " Battle of Prague."'

' I will *not* ; it would be inhuman.'

' Then I'll do worse. Miss Spraggs ! Miss



Spraggs! Miss Spraggs!' she screamed, at the top of her voice.

The poor lady woke in a fright. Her sisters hastened towards her. A violent fit of coughing came on, and seemed tearing her to pieces.

'Miss Spraggs! Jemima! Sarah! Lucy! Aho—o—y!' screamed Mrs. Bodkin again. Then, choking with laughter, she sat down to the piano, and played 'Yankee Doodle' as loud as she could—the treble in the key of C, the bass in the key of G. It was a most ingenious, but excruciating performance.

'I invented it myself! I know it hurts 'em, bless you—they are musicians!'

The poor dying lady had ceased coughing, and laid her head on her sister's shoulder. Her poor cheeks had a burning spot in the centre of each. Two large tears rolled heavily down them.

I was furious. Such superhuman wickedness was perfectly inconceivable. I determined that I would, by every means in my power, interpose between this dreadful old woman and her prey. At present I only



proposed to her to come with me to the stable and see the donkey groomed.

‘For,’ I added, ‘I think the boy ought to be made to groom him, and no doubt he will be vicious.’

Mrs. Bodkin was delighted at the idea that the hapless orphan would certainly be frightened, and perhaps be bitten or kicked. So she grasped her walking-stick and hobbled after me, forgetting her other victim in the neighbouring garden.



## CHAPTER V.

JOEY was horribly frightened at what lay before him ; but on my whispering into his ear that I wouldn't let the donkey hurt him, he came without demur. The scene that followed was sufficiently exciting and dangerous to put Mrs. Bodkin into a good humour ; but Beelzebub had at last to give in, and proved himself to be a signal instance of the triumph of mind over matter. After that, we returned to the house, and soon after had luncheon.

How I thought of the dear starving people, and wished I could have donned the invisible cloak, sat down upon the flying carpet, and conveyed to them all a taste of the good things before me ! What though I had



mainly helped to cook them? It was no more than I was accustomed to do at home by those meatless repasts of ours, where a vast amount of intellect bestowed on the cooking barely sufficed to produce any appreciable result. But I reflected that when my wages were paid I could send home the wherewithal to furnish many nice little additions to the repasts of my beloved paupers.

‘Are you fond of eating?’ asked Mrs. Bodkin.

‘Well—yes, I am afraid I am,’ I replied.

‘I love it!’ she continued, with gluttonous rapture. Oh! loathsome old woman that she was! ‘I love it! and I enjoy it all the more, when I know that those brimstone beggars next door hardly ever have a bit of meat between their lips! Bless you, it’s delicious!’

‘How can you be so wicked?’ I remonstrated. ‘You might lose all your money, and have to starve as they do.’

‘No I mightn’t! It’s in the Three per Cents.’

‘You may have some dreadful agonising illness!’



‘No—all my family are sound, and live to eighty or ninety, without a day’s illness all their lives.’

Invulnerable old monster!

‘I can’t eat any more. A pity!’ she sighed. ‘If one could only go on eating for ever! But one can’t! So, as it’s fine, we’ll go out for a drive.’

‘I will help to harness the donkey.’

‘No, that blue brimstone of a boy can do that. Bel lets himself be harnessed, because he likes to go out.’

Ere long, the car, drawn by Beelzebub, came to the door. It was very low—only about a foot from the ground—and Mrs. Bodkin popped in nimbly and in a witch-like manner.

‘Come along!’ she said to me, as she snatched the reins from Joey, and administered a sharp lash to Beelzebub, who immediately dashed off, head down, heels in the air, with great and unexpected velocity. I *did* ‘come along,’ that is to say, I clutched the rail at the back of the car, and flew along, taking gigantic strides, or rather flying leaps, till Beelzebub slackened his

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speed ; when, with one happily successful bound, I sprang into the vehicle, and tumbled on to the seat opposite to Mrs. Bodkin, my hat all awry, my hair tumbled, my face the colour of a boiled lobster, my breath all gone.

‘Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !’ crackled Mrs. Bodkin. ‘I thought I’d give you a startler ! How you *did* run !’

I was too breathless to reply ; but when I was able to do so, I told her that I didn’t intend to repeat the performance ; and she had better not attempt to play me such a trick again.

Mrs. Bodkin conversed in an animated manner as we drove along ; for the first half hour, about eating, then about the various companions, whose lives with her must have been one ceaseless system of torture ; lastly, about the poor, gentle ladies, her next-door neighbours.

‘They are starving, I know,’ she exultingly continued. ‘They give whatever meat they can afford to the one that shams ill. That’s why she does it, bless you ! Not too ill to know which side her bread is buttered ! The



others-live on vegetables and eggs. Get on, you brute !'

This last exhortation, accompanied by a whack, was addressed to Beelzebub, who had thought proper to turn sharp round into a hedge, in order to regale himself. For all answer, that, recalcitrant quadruped lashed out at the car, and, burying his head deeper in the grass and briars, resumed his repast.

'He's that obstinate, there's no managing him,' said Mrs. Bodkin. 'He'll go on of himself presently.'

So we had to wait till Beelzebub chose to go on, which he did more suddenly than could have been desired ; for another donkey drawing a cart passed, and Beelzebub gave chase to that quadruped, with an evident intention of having his heart's blood. The pair were pretty equally matched. The other donkey was not so large as Beelzebub, but on the other hand, the cart was lighter, and the wheels larger, and the owner—a costermonger, being armed with a stout stick, and liking the fun—whacked his Pegasus with a will ; and so the race continued till we came to a hill, when the costermonger pulled up,



and administered a whack to Beelzebub that quelled that being for a while. Mrs. Bodkin had been in ecstasies of delight, and had urged on Beelzebub with whip and rein, and with weird shrieks. She had looked a veritable old witch, and I felt heartily ashamed of being with her. She now laughed till I thought she would have a fit. I told her so.

‘No,’ she said, ‘none of my family ever have fits. They live to a good old age, and never have a day’s illness in their lives.’

‘I suppose that is why you can’t feel for illness,’ I remarked.

‘Yes, I suppose,’ she answered. ‘Stay, I always walk down this hill. Let me get out. You stop in, and hold the reins.’

There was a wicked gleam in her eye which ought to have warned me of intended mischief. Mrs. Bodkin had no sooner alighted, than, with her walking-stick, she administered a tremendous whack to Beelzebub, who at once bolted down the hill at full speed. I heard Mrs. Bodkin’s peals of elfin laughter, coupled with the words, ‘Aren’t you frightened *now*, Popplewags?’ I *was* dreadfully frightened, for the road was very steep



and rutty, and I thought that if the car were to capsize, it, Beelzebub, and I would be a struggling mass of heads, hoofs, and splinters. But I held on to the reins, and tried to hope for the best. Didn't Beelzebub go! Even after we had reached the bottom of the hill, he continued to gallop furiously along the level road beyond. I let him. I resolved that Mrs. Bodkin should pay dearly for the trick she had played me.

After a time Bel slackened his pace, and then subsided into a placid trot. I did not know the country; but he did, and it seemed to me that he was returning by a different route. And so he was; till at last my eyes were greeted by the railway station, and then I knew my way.

Joey and Nancy were indeed surprised to see me return alone.

'Is missis hurt? . Have you had a upset?' asked Nancy, very anxiously.

'Ave you burdered 'er, and 'id 'er body id a 'ole?' asked Joey, with a fiendish longing, gleaming out of his usually expressionless eyes.

'No, she got out of the car, and the



donkey ran away,' I replied; 'she will be here presently.'

I ordered tea to be got ready, and while waiting for it, went up to the little morning-room, and sat down at the open window with the jacket. The sick lady was not in her usual place; but I could hear the sound of talking and gardening on the other side of the wall. The voices were low and sad, and the strokes of the spade and hoe told me that the workers were women, and feeble women too.

'No,' one was saying, in a low, trembling voice, 'I don't hope any more, now! Last summer the heat weakened her, and we hoped for cooler weather; in the autumn she caught cold; in the winter she was worse. We thought she would be better in the spring; but—' a little sob closed her words.

'And we four have never been separated,' said the other; 'we four "chums," as we used to say when we were children. You and I were "chums," and they, the other two! It seems such a little, little while since we were all together with the dear old people; such a little while, and yet how long ago!'



‘Yes—ten years.’

A silence. The spade and hoe resumed work.

‘I cannot imagine why there is such an immense number of snails in this garden,’ mused one of the ‘speakers. ‘It is dreadfully vexatious; they make such fearful havoc amongst our dinners.’

I could detect the inflexion of a smile in the tones of the voice.

‘Yes, indeed,’ returned the other; ‘lately I have carried away about eighty every day, to the wood. Do you think they know their way, and come back, dear?’

‘It is hardly likely. The wood is a mile from here, you know.’

‘Now, let us gather her bouquet—poor darling!’

‘Do you really, really think there is no hope?’

‘None! none! none!’

‘It will break poor Jem’s heart.’

They moved out into the garden and carefully gathered a little basketful of flowers; then they went round the corner of the wall, and disappeared, leaving me with a heavy heart.



These poor, helpless, inoffensive, suffering creatures, evidently well-born and well-bred, probably having lived in a comfortable, certainly in a happy, home ; now struggling with poverty and affliction, and to some extent at the mercy of the fiendish old woman to whom I had the misfortune to be companion. But I resolved to oppose her, tooth and nail, in every act of aggression upon these gentle ladies. Our father had taught us, that to every living soul is sent, from time to time, a work to do ; to every living soul it is given to be brought into some place where certain people have to be helped, or fought for, or chastised, as the case may happen.. For such, there must be no drawing back, no flinching from the painful work assigned them. So he had taught us. He had said, too, that it is well to make a little stand now and then, and to consider whether we are quite sure that we are doing the one work set for us to do, or whether we are not, perhaps, stepping aside from that, and seeking strange work never meant for us.

I sat pondering over it all. At home, we four girls had had the same work. It lay



before us, so plain and clear that we could not mistake it; and it was so pleasant, that we could not have flinched from it. The work was, to cheer our dear father and mother, to make light of the ills of poverty, to economise to the last fraction without letting them know how we pinched and screwed; and to be loving and kind and happy together. The house was full of sunshine: how unlike this! Well, I had voluntarily given up my dear poverty-stricken home, left my dear, starving people, so that there might be one less to feed and clothe; and I had wondered what would be my work after that. And here it lay before me; to help these poor helpless ladies, to tame this dreadful old woman. Then I fell to musing again, thinking of our pale gentle mother, and of the dear, merry girls; till I could not see the stitches I was putting into Joey's jacket, and a rain of tears forced me to lay it down.

Just then I heard a vehicle stop at the door. There was a tremendous pull at the bell; and the next instant the voice of Mrs. Bodkin was shrieking through the house.



‘Where is she?—the blue—blue—blue—blue——’ She was evidently choking with rage.

I hastily dried my eyes, resumed my work, and girded up my loins unto the battle.

I heard poor Nancy stammer, in terrified accents, that ‘she thought I was in the garden.’ Poor kind soul! The recording angel surely left his pen behind his ear on that occasion! Then she came running up to me, with, ‘Oh miss! miss! run away for your life! She’ll murder you!’

‘No she won’t, Nancy,’ I calmly replied, inwardly conscious of a considerable amount of trepidation. Joey had run into the garden, apparently full of zeal in the old lady’s service.

‘She ain’t ’ere, bissis, she’s id the ’ouse— There she be! ub ad thad widdow!’ said the mean orphan.

‘Oh! you blue—blue—blue——’ she shrieked, shaking her walking-stick at me. ‘Wait till I come up! Oh, you blue—blue—blue——’

“Blue brimstone,” perhaps you mean, Mrs. Bodkin,’ I replied, politely helping her.

For all answer, she darted headlong into the house; and the next moment I heard



her come hopping upstairs, like an aged and vehement crow, her walking-stick going clump! clump! clump! and the banisters creaking under her weight. I thought it prudent to lock the door.

It was well that I did so; for she turned the handle with a wrench that told me her fury was at boiling-point.

‘Let me in! let me in! you belangering, spedificous, mirondering! Oh! bah! go along with you, you blue—blue——’

I heard her gasping for breath, and thought, that if I remained silent she would fancy I was speechless with terror; so I laughed.

‘What are you laughing at, you belan—.’

‘Stop!’ I said, ‘I know what you are going to say—“Belangering, spedificous, mirondering, blue brimstone.” But you’d better *not* say it!’

‘Why not?’

This was what I wanted; to get her to a parley.

‘Because, if you do, I shall rush out and give you such a shaking as you never had in your life!’



'I don't believe it! you *are* afraid of me! you know you are, or you wouldn't have locked yourself into the room.'

'Wouldn't I?' I unlocked the door, took out the key, and threw it wide open. Mrs. Bodkin rushed in with her stick swung aloft. I jumped aside, leaving her to leap straight forward into the room; while I flew out, and quickly locked the door on the outside.

Mrs. Bodkin shrieked with rage, and battered upon the door with her stick and fist, but in vain.

Hearing an odd kind of noise below, I looked over the banisters, and beheld Joey dancing a weird workhouse war-dance in the hall, expressive of delirious rapture. Poor Nancy stood half-way upstairs, blanched with terror, her poor thin toil-stained hands clasped tight together.

I let Mrs. Bodkin batter away till she was tired. Then she renewed the parley.

'Let me out, I say!'

'I dare not.'

'Ah! afraid at last!'

'Not a bit! I have locked you up for



protection against myself. I feel that I could *not* keep my hands off you !

Silence : then—

‘ You are a devil !’

‘ You said that before.’

‘ A *strong* devil !’

‘ Also a reiteration.’

‘ A *very* strong devil !’

‘ You deal in repetitions.’

‘ If I promise not to touch you, will you let me out ?’

‘ Not yet.’

‘ Why not ?’

‘ Because I dare not, till I feel that I can keep my hands off you.’

Silence again. After five minutes—

‘ Are you cooling, Miss Popplewags ?’

‘ My pulse has fallen a trifle.’

‘ How is your pulse now ?’

‘ Ten less.’

Five minutes later, I unlocked the door and entered the room. The old lady glanced at me apprehensively. I walked up to her, and, clenching my fist, advanced it slowly to within half an inch of her face.

‘ Shake hands,’ she said.



I did so.

‘Are we friends?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Then perhaps you wouldn’t mind my saying, that I think you might like to leave this day month.’

‘I don’t intend to leave.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because if I did, I should go and live with those ladies next door, and be a perfect treasure to them, and teach them how to pay you off for all the tricks you’ve played them. If I were to turn against you, I could prove that you are a nuisance in the place, and I could have you punished. Well, that would not be a good thing for me. I wish to avoid the temptation to hunt you down, you know.’

‘You couldn’t afford to live with those blue brimstone beggars! You have no money!’

‘I could afford it for a month, at all events, and I *would*!’

I spoke half in earnest, scarcely knowing what I said. I had a great loathing of my present life; a very tender yearning towards these poor afflicted ladies.



'Do you want to go to them?' she asked.

'Do you pity them?'

'Indeed I do.'

'Do you want to comfort 'em, and work for 'em, and be a treasure to 'em?'

'I do.'

'Then I won't let you go there! But I hate 'em all the more!'

'Suppose we have a cup of 'tea now,' I said.



## CHAPTER VI.

AND so my last combat *à outrance* with Mrs. Bodkin ended. All through dinner, and for the rest of the evening, she was blandly amiable; and when I wished her good-night, she said, 'God bless you, Popplewags.' But a blessing from her lips seemed more like a curse, awesome and gruesome to a degree.

That night I was woke by the sound of wailing and lamentation. Mrs. Bodkin was lamenting over the state of things in general.

'Oh, miserable old woman that I am! I haven't a friend in the world! Those beggars have got nothing to give, and yet they got round that poor washed-out thing I had, with their melangering ways; and now they'd take Popplewags from me. And she'd go, too,



and starve with 'em ! I've fed her well, and been kind to her, and she'd leave me for 'em ! Oh, the blue brimstone ingratitude of the world ! Brimstone is a joke to it ! But I'll keep her here to spite 'em—I hate 'em ! I hate 'em !

With this pious sentiment, Mrs. Bodkin fell asleep, and so did I ; but not till my pillow was wet with tears, for thinking of the dear absent ones, who would have cried their eyes out if they had known what I was going through.

But they did not. Days passed on ; and I wrote them cheery letters, filled with pious frauds, intended to delude them into the belief that I was living in a charming, peaceful, luxurious home, treated like an adopted daughter by the dearest and sweetest of old ladies. Ah me ! it was hard work !

And a week passed away. Then came a letter from Georgie, telling me she had 'got a place' as nursery-governess at Spalding—fifty miles from home. She did not enter into any particulars, at which I was vexed ; but she wrote in a hurry, as she was in the midst of arranging her 'troussow' (as she



spelt it) for the occasion. I did hope that, for once, our dear father would be energetic and business-like, and would make all needful inquiries about Georgie's 'place;' but I did not think it likely. We girls were so in the habit of arranging matters independently, and our parents had such confidence in our sense and discretion, that our dear, easy-going father was not likely to bestir himself unduly. Georgie said that she could not hope to be as fortunate as I was; that I had indeed fallen upon pleasant places; that she envied me, and could kiss and hug the dear old lady who made me so happy, etc., etc. She hoped, however, to be able to make a home where she was going, and would write to me as soon as she was a little settled.

Mary also wrote to say, that she too had found a situation, as amanuensis to a lady.

Meanwhile the days had passed much as before. The old lady did her best to torment every one but myself; Joey's cold in the head appeared chronic, so did his repulsive meanness and general loathsomeness; Nancy was still crumpled up and nervous; the



Spraggs family still came flying in at the food-call, Miss Spraggs and Miss Jemima generally having a fight for precedence, and Miss Lucy separating them as before ; Miss Sarah benignly contemplating the fray, while placidly arranging her toilet. The poor, gentle ladies still worked in the garden, the invalid taking up her accustomed place for a shorter and shorter time each day.

It was Sunday—a lovely bright day. Mrs. Bodkin appeared at breakfast in a brilliant violet silk dress. A general air of hilarity pervaded her aspect.

‘I like Sunday,’ she exclaimed. ‘The two workhouse brats would like to have a holiday on Sundays—go for a walk, pick up friends. Ah ha ! I make ’em go to church with me ! Ah ha !’

‘Take care ; you will choke !’ I remonstrated ; for Mrs. Bodkin was laughing heartily at her words.

‘They know that poor people generally have a bit of meat on Sunday, so I make ’em fast ; I give ’em cold potatoes and bread, and no sugar in their tea ! And I read ’em a sermon, bless you, and talk to ’em about hell



fire and devils, till they are afraid to go to bed !’

‘I think you the most utterly wicked person I have ever known,’ I gravely remarked.

‘Don’t preach, Popplewags ; we’ll have enough of that presently,’ said Mrs. Bodkin, with quite a jovial air.

Breakfast over, Mrs. Bodkin commenced a raid upon her domestics ; while I was told off to assemble and feed the Spraggs family.

‘Miss Spraggs ! Jemima ! Lucy ! Sally ! Spraggs ! Spraggs ! Spraggs !’ I called, at the top of my voice, on the Bodkin side of the garden wall ; Mrs. Bodkin having told me that some of them were in the next garden.

To my consternation, a soft, sweet voice addressed me from the other side.

‘Young person—excuse me, I don’t know your name—*pray, pray* forbear ! What have we done, that you should take pleasure in insulting and an—annoy——’

The voice quivered, and then broke down.



I answered, in broken and hurried speech, as best I could :

‘ Indeed, indeed, I did not mean to annoy you ! How have I done so ? ’

‘ By calling the cats as you do. Surely you—surely you must know it is offensive. ’

‘ No, indeed ! I only did as I was told. ’

‘ Don’t you know that our name is Spraggs ? ’

‘ Indeed, no ! ’

‘ Did you not know that Mrs. Bodkin named her cats after us, in order that she might insult us by calling out our names ? ’

I was silent—speechless with indignant sorrow.

‘ Ah ! you *did* know it, then ! But pray be merciful—at all events, for the little time our sister has to live ! ’

‘ I did *not* know it ! ’ I exclaimed. ‘ I was too horrified at what I have been made to do, for words. I should like to get over the garden wall, and go down on my knees to ask your forgiveness. Oh ! if I had known ! ’

‘ I am so glad to hear you did not mean



it,' she replied, in a tone of gentle pleasure.

'Mean it! As if the world *could* contain *two* such brutes as that dreadful old woman!' I indignantly exclaimed. But I corrected myself. 'Ah! I am wrong! I have no right to eat her bread, and to speak against her! But, believe me, you shall suffer no annoyance that *I* can prevent. Oh, that "Battle of Prague!" I will lock the piano, and lose the key; so you need not fear hearing that excruciating performance again.'

'Thank you.'

'I will alter the cats' names. I shall have to give them some names that will catch Mrs. Bodkin's fancy.'

'You are indeed kind.'

'Tell your dear suffering sister, that she shall *not* be disturbed again while I am in the house.'

'I will. I cannot tell you how grateful we shall all feel.'

'Popplewags! Popplewags!' screamed Mrs. Bodkin. 'Why don't you call the cats? Where are you? What are you about?'

'I must go,' I said to my new friend.



‘Good-bye. Thank you so much, dear Miss Popplewags,’ she replied.

‘Puss ! puss ! puss !’ I called.

‘Why don’t you call ’em Spraggs?’ she asked.

‘Because I know why you have given them that name ; so I will neither call them by it, nor suffer you to do so,’ I replied.

‘What will you call ’em, then ?’ she asked.

‘Lucy shall be “Lucifer”—a born devil, you know !’

‘Yes ; I like that !’

‘Miss Spraggs shall be “Satan.”’

‘Capital !’

‘Miss Jemima shall be “Devil’s imp.”’

‘First rate !’

‘Miss Sarah shall be—I don’t know of a name for him.’

‘Call him Sarah still,’ coaxed Mrs. Bodkin.

‘No. Suppose we call him “Deuce.”’

‘Yes ; that is famous.’

‘Now, as they don’t seem to come, they can’t be very hungry ; so we may as well dress for church.’



In due time we were all arrayed, and standing in the hall. Mrs. Bodkin's attire was gorgeous. A heavy violet plume nodded majestically over a white satin bonnet; her violet silk train swept the ground; a large deep-fringed shawl of China crape flowed gracefully around her; delicate lemon kid gloves and a white parasol completed her attire. Her cheeks, usually dark and sallow, were flushed with a brilliant pink; her auburn hair was arranged in little rings all along her forehead. She seemed much pleased with herself, and asked me how I liked her appearance. I shuffled out of the dilemma by replying that 'I never made personal remarks, and never paid compliments,' which quite satisfied her, as it implied so much.

When we had all left the house, Mrs. Bodkin locked the door, and handed the key to Joey, who was arrayed in a coat many sizes too small for him, and trousers that barely reached his ankles.

'I like to make him look ridiculous,' said Mrs. Bodkin. 'The other boys laugh at him, bless you! call him "Work'us!" shout after him, "Who's your tailor?" He used to



cry, but now he doesn't. His pride is brought down, bless you !'

The two orphans were made to walk in front of us.

'Makes 'em feel uncomfortable ; brings down their brimstone pride,' continued Mrs. Bodkin. 'And with me behind 'em, they can't talk to each other—can't play tricks. And if they don't walk fast enough, I run my stick into the small of their back—makes 'em jump, that does.'

'Do you think all that sort of thing makes you happy ?' I asked.

'*Of course* it does !' she replied, opening her eyes in amazement.

As this appeared to be an unanswerable argument, I said nothing, and we walked on till we reached the church. Mrs. Bodkin had enlivened herself on the way, by thrice rapping Joey on the head with her stick, and once poking Nancy in the small of her back.

Mrs. Bodkin's devotions were peculiar, to say the least of it. Her pew was square, with a high back all round ; and in its seclusion she could, unseen, molest the



orphans to her heart's content. She and I sat together, and those two afflicted ones opposite; so not only did her stick do efficient service upon their shins, toes, chests, and heads, but her tongue supplied the rest, by hissing forth awful threats of evil to come, for the especial behoof of the unhappy orphans.

“*We beseech Thee to*”—I’ll warm your nose for you, Joey, in another minute!’ (Joey had presumed to glance up at the gallery.)—‘Won’t I give you a basting presently!’ (to Nancy.)—“*mercifully look upon*”—you brimstone brat! let me catch you napping again!’—(dig in the ribs). ‘Don’t I keep ’em in order?’ (to me).

Devotion was impossible. Indignation, strongly tintured with an increasing tendency to laughter, kept me in a state of torture. But at last my thoughts flowed into another channel—homewards, to the old pew where we used to assemble in the pleasant vanished time, now empty of all, save the gentle, blue-eyed mother, and little Kitty.

I forgot where I was, till recalled to the dreadful reality by a little subdued shriek



from Joey, who was rubbing his toe in great apparent anguish. Mrs. Bodkin shook her fist menacingly, and the orphan became meekly quiescent.



## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN the sermon came to an end, I knelt down and offered up a petition that I might in some way be enabled to do good to this fearful old woman, and try to neutralise the mischievous effect her treatment might have upon these poor children.

We walked home in the same order as we had come ; but as we were surrounded for the most part by other people, Mrs. Bodkin did not personally maltreat the orphans. From time to time, however, she whispered awful hints of what *might* happen to them after they arrived at home if they presumed to consider their souls their own, meanwhile.

During dinner, which was early on Sundays, she made both of them wait at table.



'It brings down their greedy stomachs, bless you!' she said. 'They are longing to be eating, you know; it tantalises 'em to smell the food, bless you!'

'Have they not dined yet?' I asked.

'Not they, the brimstone brats!'

'Poor things!' I sighed.

'Come here, Joey!' snapped Mrs. Bodkin. That parochial orphan immediately obeyed.

'Come here, Nancy!'

Nancy advanced tremblingly.

'There! There! *That's* for you! And that's because Popplewags pitied you!'

Each 'there' was accompanied by a stinging whack on the fingers of either orphan, administered with the handle of the carving-knife. A howl from Joey, and a piteous cry from Nancy, accompanied the application.

'There, Popplewags! I always do that when anybody pities 'em, "lest they be puffed up without measure," as Solomon says. I can talk Scripture on Sunday, you see!'

'If you beat them again, *I* shall have to do something!' I remarked.

"A contentious woman and a very wet



day are alike." "Spare the whack and spoil the brat."

I perceived that Mrs. Bodkin regarded Sunday a day set apart for what she considered Scriptural quotations; so I capped her with:

"Behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter."

'There!' exclaimed Mrs. Bodkin. 'Why, even the Bible says we ought to oppress when we have the power! And again, "Whatever thy hand is able to do, do it with all thy might." And so, that for you, Joey!' administering a tremendous rap on his knuckles with the carver.

'Ah, Mrs. Bodkin!' I said, "'God shall bring every secret work into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be evil!'"

'Fiddle-dee-dee! gammon and spinach! What do you make of this, Popplewags: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes"—eh?'

'Right in his *own* eyes, Mrs. Bodkin; but not right in the eyes of *God*!'



‘ Ah, bah ! Don’t teach *me*, Popplewags ! The more you take up these workhouse brats, the more I shall beat ’em, and pinch ’em, and whack ’em ! ’

Dinner over, I told Mrs. Bodkin that I was accustomed to spend Sunday afternoon in my own room. I then retired to that sanctuary. It was over the little morning-room, and therefore overlooked the adjoining garden. Two of the Misses Spraggs were walking slowly to and fro along the path opposite. One of them happened to look up, and, seeing me at the window, smiled and bent her head. I did the same, and then withdrew from the window, and sat down to write a letter to my home darlings. And then my thoughts so flew to the dear place—so nestled into it, as it were—that I quite forgot where I was, and was recalled to the present by the sound of a cough in the adjoining garden.

I softly approached the window, expecting to see the invalid. She was not there, nor were the two ladies I had seen ; but the other one was there instead, walking slowly along, with drooping figure and clasped hands.



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"Fiddle-dee-dee! gammon and spinach!  
What do you make of this, Popplewags?"

"Every way of a man is right in his own  
eyes"—eh?

"Right in his own eyes, Mrs. Bodkin; but  
not right in the eyes of God!"



' Ah, bah! Don't tremble! I am not afraid. The more you take up, the more I shall beat 'em! I shall whack 'em!'

Dinner over, I told Mrs. B. that I was accustomed to spend some time in my own room. I then retired to that sanctuary. It was over the little sitting-room, and there was overlooked the adjoining garden. The Misses Spraggs were walking up and fro along the path opposite my window. I happened to look out, and saw one at the window, smiled at her, and she did the same, and then she went to the window, and sat down to read, and the other darlings. And then as I was sitting at the dear place, I noticed that I was quite alone, and was recalled to the presence of the ladies enough in the adjoining garden.

I softly approached the window, expecting to see the maid. She was not there, nor were the two ladies I had seen; but the other one was there, sitting, walking slowly along, with drooping figure and clasped hands.



Her whole bearing was so full of unutterable woe, as to give me a sad heartache, and to fill me with a great, though ineffectual, yearning to comfort the poor stricken lady and her gentle sisters. If I only knew them ! If I could in any way help them ! Alas ! I was powerless !

I withdrew from the window, and tried to resume my home letter ; but in vain. I could not abstract my thoughts from the poor suffering lady ; so I again went to look out. She was sitting on the edge of a little rockery at the farther end of the garden. I saw that she was shaken by a great passion of grief. I had no right to witness it. I turned resolutely away, and went on with my letter. When it was finished, I again looked into the garden ; but the lady was no longer there.

I thought I could understand the whole. Her sister—evidently her favourite sister—was too ill to come into the garden any more. Probably all hope was over. The other one had come out to indulge her grief alone, not to disturb the others.

The day was very hot—too hot for closed



windows. I noticed that a bedroom window on the side of the house facing us, was open at the top, though the shutters were half closed. I supposed that was the poor dying lady's bedroom. In that case, Mrs. Bodkin had it in her power to annoy her whenever my back was turned, by one or the other of her ingenious modes of torture.

Hardly had the thought occurred to me, when I heard Mrs. Bodkin come stumping upstairs, and enter the morning-room. The next instant, the 'Old Hundredth' was played vigorously—the treble in one key, the bass in another, the loud pedal on !

Simultaneously, one of the ladies appeared at the half-closed shutter, and, seeing me, made me an appealing gesture. I waved my hand to her, darted downstairs, whisked Mrs. Bodkin away from the piano, locked it, and flung the key through the open window, over the wall into the next garden. I was rewarded by a gesture of intense gratitude from two of the ladies, who then again drew the shutters, and disappeared.

Mrs. Bodkin foamed with rage, so I pretended to be in a still greater passion. First,



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han  
the :

I went to the window, and tried to  
 see what was going on; but in vain. I  
 could not see any thing from the poor  
 window. I again went to look  
 at the scene at the edge of a little  
 garden and of the garden. I  
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I gave her a shaking, and deposited her on the sofa; then I dashed to the ground the cheapest of a set of very cheap ornaments, breaking it into fragments; then I paused, as if for breath.

The old lady was quelled.

‘My! what a temper! And on Sunday, too!’ she exclaimed.

‘Temper indeed!’ I ejaculated. ‘Temper! Oh, that’s nothing to what I *can* be when I’m fairly roused! Now, I’ll tell you what it is. If you dare to annoy those poor ladies any more, *I’ll—do—Something!*’

‘What?’

‘You will know, *when I do it!*’

‘Oh! there will be no need. But, I say, Popplewags, do you go on in this way at home?’

‘No; it is only wicked people who make me fly into these passions. They are all good at home.’

‘And so may I be, for all you know.’

‘You had better give some proof of it, perhaps.’

‘Popplewags!’

‘Well?’



‘Would you like me if I were good?’

‘I can’t say. You are not a very lovable person at present.’

‘You don’t like me now?’

‘Far from it.’

‘Well, I like *you*; you are honest, and you amuse me—you are so *new*.’

The days passed on in one almost unvarying routine of fighting with Beelzebub, feeding the cats, driving, eating, sleeping, and persecuting the orphans. Each day the two sisters took their little airing, arm-in-arm, looking very, very sad. They no longer worked in the garden; I suppose the noise would have disturbed their dying sister. They bowed gently when they saw me, and on leaving the garden in the evening kissed their hands to me. The third sister never appeared at all. I had grown so fond of them, that I quite longed for the moment when any of them would come into the garden.

One day I looked in vain; they did not come. What had happened? Was it over? Had the poor sick one ceased to suffer? And her second self—her poor, desolate sister?



Days passed on, yet they did not appear. I was inexpressibly lonely, and yearned to know what was happening. At last it occurred to me to do what I might so easily have done at first—namely, to insist upon driving past their house as we went out, instead of turning to the right and making for the country as usual. I did so, and, on looking up at their house, saw that all the blinds were down. So then I knew that the poor lady was dead.

Then followed a weary monotony of days ; but at the end of another week, as I was listlessly sauntering with the cats in the garden one night, trying to get a little cool air, I heard footsteps the other side of the wall, and the sound of two sad voices.

‘Yes, love, it is indeed better so,’ said one; ‘better that they should go together, than that poor Jemima should have lingered on with a broken heart. Better for *us*, to know that they are happy together somewhere, than to have seen her suffering day after day, and longing to go.’

‘Yes, it is better so, Lucy darling. And we always knew she had heart-disease, and



that any great shock of grief would kill her.'

'How cool it is, Sarah dear; how cold, and pure, and happy, the stars look! Are they in one of them, I wonder?'

They talked a little longer; then went away. I had not meant to be an eavesdropper; yet I had not moved, for fear of disturbing them, and driving them into the house. My heart ached with sympathy. Oh that I could help them!

My weary longing was broken in upon by Nancy, who came along the gravel path through the darkness, and whispered, 'Miss! miss!'

'What is it, Nancy?' I asked.

'Oh, miss, there's two bad-looking fellows hanging about the house, and I think they're no good.'

'Nonsense, Nancy.'

'Please, miss, *'tisn't* nonsense. I'm certain sure they're no good.'

'What harm do you think they can do you?' I asked.

'I don't know, miss; but, just now they rang at the bell; and when I answered it



they asked if Miss Jones lived here, and I said "No—Mrs. Bodkin." And then one of 'em he took and chucked me under the chin, and said I was "a pretty girl, and would I keep company with him?"'

'What did you do?'

'Shut the door in his face, the nasty fellow!'

'You did quite right, Nancy.'

I thought no more of the matter, but went into the morning-room to finish writing a letter to Mary. She, like Georgie, wrote cheerily; and I felt immense comfort in the thought that they were happy, and that I had the worst lot of the three. I was in the full tide of weaving together the usual web of pleasant fictions, wherewith I filled my home missives to my dear, impecunious relatives, when I was interrupted by a tap at the door.

'Come in!' I said; and in came Joey.

His manner was peculiar and extraordinary. After carefully shutting the door behind him, he advanced on tiptoe into the room, came close to me, and, in sepulchral tones, whispered:



‘I wadt to be a adbiral !’

‘An admiral, Joey !’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes, a adbiral—to live id a bad-o’-war, ad have dothing to do, ad dever groob a dod-key dor go to church doe bore.’

‘Nonsense, Joey! *You* an admiral! You are not a bit like one—never could be !’

‘Yes ; a gentlebad has told be I should bake a fide sailor-boy, and he’s goid to bake me a adbiral whed I rud away frob bissis—he is !’ (Sniff.)

‘Stuff! Just go and do your work, Joey ; and don’t talk any more nonsense,’ I said.

‘I *will* be a adbiral !’ muttered Joey, as he left the room.

I went on with my letter to Mary, finished it, and went downstairs to tea, bestowing no further thought upon the two mysterious communications.







to be a admiral!

Admiral, Joey? I exclaimed.

A admiral—to live ad a 'bad-o'-war,  
nothing to do, ad never grab a dod-  
o to church doe bore?

Nase, Joey? You an admiral? You  
bit like one—never could be!

A gentlebad has told be I should  
be sailor-boy, and he's goid to be a  
Admiral whed I run away frob lissis—  
(Sniff)

"Just go and do your work, Joey;  
I talk any more nonsense," I said.

"Be a admiral?" muttered Joey, as he  
room.

At an with my letter to Mary, finished  
went downstairs to be bestowing no  
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narcissus.



## CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BODKIN had taken the very unpleasant turn of growing fond—nauseously so, I thought—of me. This fondness was shown in various ways. She heaped my plate with all the choicest morsels on the table; she made me presents of handsome dresses, costly lace, and rich jewellery; she consulted me and deferred to me in everything. Vainly did I refuse her gifts, reminding her that I was only a new-comer, and might leave her very soon. She would take no refusal. Then she took to calling me ‘dear,’ and ‘love,’ and ‘her adopted daughter.’ Finally, and worse than all the rest, she attempted personal endearments. This I could not stand. I told her that mine was not an



affectionate nature, and that I hated caressing. After that she had to content herself with calling me 'sweetie,' and 'dearie,' and so on ; and would gaze upon me with a fondness that was to me quite loathsome. To crown all, when my 'month was up,' she paid me at the rate of twenty-five pounds a year, instead of eighteen, as covenanted.

'And now, lovey-dovey,' she said, 'you'll never leave me, will you ?'

'Of course I am less likely to leave you now, because I shall be able to send home a good little sum out of my increased wages,' was my matter-of-fact reply.

'And whatever you want you shall have, dovey,' pursued Mrs. Bodkin. 'No matter what you ask me for, you shall have it.'

As if to test her words, a note was brought in to me a few days later.

'Who can it be from ?' I exclaimed.

This was the note :

'DEAR MISS POPPLEWAGS,

'My sister is very ill indeed. The doctor has ordered brandy. I have none in the house, and cannot leave her while I



go to get it. Could you induce Mrs. Bodkin to lend me a bottle, which I will return on the very first opportunity?

‘In great haste and trouble,

‘Yours sincerely,

‘LUCY SPRAGGS.’

In reply I wrote :

‘DEAR MISS SPRAGGS,

‘You shall have it immediately, and anything else that you require.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘LUCY SEYMOUR.’

‘Take this in to Miss Spraggs, Nancy,’ I said.

‘What! what! WHAT!’ screamed Mrs. Bodkin.

‘You told me that you would refuse no request of mine, whatever it might be,’ I said.

‘Well—yes—yes——’ rather doubtfully.

‘And so,’ I resumed, ‘I ask you to let me have a bottle of brandy, to take to Miss Spraggs, whose sister is ill.’

Mrs. Bodkin had evidently been very



much taken aback, if not shocked, at the death of the two sisters; nevertheless, she hesitated. I pursued :

‘Come! let me have it!’

‘And if I don’t, what then?’

‘I shall go to the town for it, and never return to you.’

‘There, there—take it—take it! You *will* have your own way! And won’t you love me a *little* bit in return?’

I felt, in a way, touched at this appeal from the poor, helpless, unlovable old creature; and I answered :

‘Perhaps.’

‘Don’t be long away, dearie.’

‘No.’

It was evening, and quite dusk, as, with my bottle of brandy in my hand, I left the house. Outside was a man, who, for the moment mistaking me for Nancy, whispered:

‘Won’t you let me in for a little chat, my dear?’

I looked him full in the face, and he saw his mistake. Muttering something, he walked quickly away. He was a dark man, tall and muscular, and limped a little. I was too full



of my mission to think much of the man. While waiting for the door to be opened, I saw, to my astonishment, Joey fly past in the direction the man had taken.

The door was opened by Miss Lucy.

‘Oh, thank you! thank you! Do come in!’ she said.

‘Shall I not be intruding?’ I asked.

‘Oh, no—no! Do come in, and tell me what you think of her. It is so dreadful, having no one to help me. Do you know anything of illness?’

‘A little.’

‘Come in and see Sarah; she will be glad to see you. We consider you a friend, you know,’ said gentle Miss Lucy.

It was foolish of me, but I could not help it: I buried my face in my hands, and gave way to a few weak, hysterical sobs.

‘Oh, how wrong of me! how silly!’ I exclaimed, struggling for self-control. ‘Pray forgive me! I have thought of you so much!’

‘Thank you. *How* kind!’ was the answer, in *such* a soft voice.

I saw that poor Miss Sarah was fearfully



weak—dying of starvation, it seemed to me.  
I said :

‘She must have all sorts of nourishing things, and then I am *sure* she will rally.’

The invalid gently moved her head, and said :

‘Tell her, Lucy.’

‘We are very, very poor. We cannot afford meat, and wine, and other nourishing things. We owe so much money for the doctor, and—and—the—you know—the funeral.’

‘Yes, I know,’ I sadly replied ; ‘but you must let me manage it all. Mrs. Bodkin is a very peculiar old lady, no doubt ; but she refuses *me* nothing. She sent you this brandy, and I am to bring you whatever I like.’

‘But——’ demurred the invalid.

‘Indeed, it must be so, if only for poor Mrs. Bodkin’s sake,’ I persisted. ‘I think she must have been made hard by having had to do with hard and cruel people. I am trying to soften her, and this will be the very best way. Miss Sarah, you won’t refuse the



means of getting well? For your sister's sake, if not for Mrs. Bodkin's!

So they gave in; and for the next week I was in and out constantly, plying both the dear, gentle souls with all the nourishing things I could think of. And the invalid began to gain health and strength, and her sister looked stronger too, and I was quite happy. Mrs. Bodkin bore it all most patiently, and was in wonderful health and spirits, making no objection to my spending whole hours with the Misses Spraggs.

One day, having sent the two ladies out for a drive, I returned when I was not expected, and popped in upon a scene that transfixed me with surprise.

Mrs. Bodkin was seated on the sofa, arrayed in her gorgeous violet silk dress, and her jauntiest and most juvenile cap; her fingers were one blaze of jewellery; she wore long gold pendants in her ears, and her Sunday colour on her cheeks. Beside her—very close to her—sat the man who had accosted me outside the house but a week ago!

Completely taken aback, I stood before



them, staring as if I beheld an apparition. I stammered something like, 'I beg your pardon ; I did not know——' and there I, stuck fast.

Mrs. Bodkin would perhaps have blushed if she could have done so through her Sunday colour ; but that was not possible. She recovered herself the soonest, and said :

'Ah ha ! Popplewags, my dear ! I've stolen a march upon you ! I have *my* friends as well as you ! Allow me to introduce Captain Montague Delamere, my — my——' Here Mrs. Bodkin simpered, and, with her head coyly turned aside, added, 'My intended husband !'

'Impossible !' I ejaculated.

'Why "impossible ?"' asked Captain Montague Delamere, in grossly insolent tones.

I did not answer him. I addressed Mrs. Bodkin :

'At your age——'

'"Age," indeed !' exclaimed the captain. 'Age ! That is a good joke ! If you had ever lived in the world, Miss Popplewags, you would know that we men of fashion prefer a well-preserved, handsome widow

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of forty-five or so, to a wishy-washy chit of a girl, with neither mind, manners, nor style !’

‘What do you know of this man ?’ I asked.

‘“Man,” indeed !’ snapped Mrs. Bodkin. ‘You mustn’t mind her, my dear captain ; she’s only a poor melanjerer thing, the daughter of a country pill-box—a good girl, though.’

‘My father is a clergyman, as I have before told you !’ I indignantly exclaimed.

‘And pray, Miss Pill-box,’ said Captain Montague Delamere, ‘what have you to say, why our charming friend shouldn’t marry Old Nick himself, if she has a mind to ?’

‘Nothing. I have no right to interfere. She is her own mistress,’ I replied.

‘Then why do you object ?’

‘Only because I believe you are an impostor, and that she will bitterly repent marrying you !’

‘That’s *my* affair !’ cackled Mrs. Bodkin.

I saw it was useless to say anything more, so I quietly left the room ; but I was determined, if possible, to find out who this man was.



A week passed away ; yet I had discovered nothing. Perhaps my pleasure in the society of my new friend made me a little remiss in the performance of what was undoubtedly my duty towards the poor old lady.

The wedding-day approached. Mrs. Bodkin had wished to retain my services as house-keeper after her marriage ; but I had declined. I thought that the spectacle of the poor old woman's unhappiness would be a trial that I was not called upon to endure. So I was to leave before the wedding.

One evening, when I was slowly wandering to and fro in the garden, the unpleasant form of Joey came shambling up to me through the dusk.

‘ Biss ! biss ! ’ he whispered.

‘ What is it, Joey ? ’ I asked.

‘ This ’ere baper tumbled out of ’is bocket,’ snuffled Joey.

‘ Whose pocket ? ’

‘ The capting’s. Please, biss, will you read it to be, and see whether it’s the dote to the Brince of Wales he spoke on ? ’

‘ What note, Joey ? Why don’t you blow your nose ? ’ I impatiently demanded.



‘Can’t blow by dose, biss. Dose won’t blow. But do’ee read the dote! do’ee! ’E said—’e did—as ’ow ’e’d wrote a dote to ’is friend the Brince of Wales, and Cobbadder-id-Chief, to tell theb to bake be a adbiral. ’E said as ’ow ’e’d got the dote id ’is bocket.’ (Sniff.)

‘What were you to do to please him, before he made you an admiral?’ I asked.

‘I wasn’t fur to tell,’ said Joey.

‘If you don’t tell, I won’t read the note; and I will tell him you have it, and he will be so angry that he won’t have anything more to do with you.’

‘Will you read the dote if I tell?’ asked Joey.

‘Yes.’

‘Well, then, I was fur to tell ’im all about bissis, and where she slep’, and where she kep’ her bunny, and where you slep’, and I was to lend ’im the key of the ’ouse for a hour or two.’ (Sneeze.)

‘Yes. When?’

‘The day before yesterday.’

‘What else?’



‘I was fur to tell ’im where the plate was kep’, and I told ’im in bissis’s roob.’

‘Why did he say he wanted to know all this, and why did he want the door-key?’

‘He said as ’ow it were to tell bissis’s furtune (to abuse her like), and ’e was to pretend to know hevrythink about the ’ouse, and where hevrythink was kep’, and he was fur to tell her as ’ow the *sperrits* told him—just for fun, like, you doe, biss. And the door-key was fur to conjure with. Dow, read the dote.’

I did; making no scruple of breaking the seal. The envelope was stamped, ready for the post, and addressed to ‘Henry Jenkins, Esq., Post Office, Ludgate Circus, London.’

Vainly did I puzzle my brains to understand it. It was nearly all written in what, I have since learnt, is called ‘thieves’ patter,’ intermingled here and there with some expressions which had for me a glimmering of meaning. ‘Old jade’ was evidently meant for Mrs. Bodkin; ‘Young filly’s half fly’ meant, no doubt, that I suspected him; ‘Workus’ was evidently Joey. Then, he evidently desired his friend to come to him;



and there was an allusion to 'knuckledusters' and 'darkies;' and something, or somebody, was to be 'stashed;' but all that was a mystery to me. A postscript, however, was quite intelligible. It ran thus: 'Tell my gal I shall soon be back to her and the kids with lots of the rhino.'

Joey was just as hopelessly bewildered as I was; disappointed too; as the word 'Admiral' never occurred once in the course of the letter.

'Now, Joey,' I began, with solemn emphasis, 'if you don't mind, you will get yourself into trouble. This man has deceived you. He never meant to make you an admiral. Where is he now?'

'Id the parlour alog of bissis.'

'Won't he miss his letter?'

'E 'ave. 'E cub to be this bordig, ad 'e says—says 'e—" 'Ave you bicked up a letter?" 'e says. "Doe, sir," says I. And thed 'e ups ad 'unts about hunder hevrything id the parlour, ad 'e says—to hisself like (a butterig, you doe, biss), "Very hod," 'e says. "Braps I posted it," says 'e. "Write addother to bake sure," 'e says.'



‘Well, Joey, you just hold your tongue about this, and some day (if I can) *I* will make you an admiral.’

‘And shall I wear a cocked ‘at, biss, ad a big sword, ad a gud, ad spurs, ad a scarlet goat all covered with gold ad jools?’

‘If you ever become an admiral, you can wear what you please, Joey; but you never will, if you snuffle in that disgusting manner,’ I said, fairly exasperated.

Some days passed, and then the captain went away ‘to get the licence.’ I was miserably perplexed what to do. Mrs. Bodkin was so infatuated by him, that I feared it would be useless to show her the note. The day after his departure, however, I broached the subject while driving out with her. Since her betrothal, Mrs. Bodkin had discontinued her drives, and had graciously allowed me to take my friends out instead, for the double purpose, I knew, of exercising Beelzebub and of getting rid of me.

‘When does Captain Delamere return?’ I asked.

‘In a week,’ she replied. ‘Dear man! he



said he should count the hours and minutes till he came back !

How ludicrous it would have been, had it not been so sad !

‘And ’t isn’t my money he’s after ; don’t tell me !’

I had *not* ‘told’ her ; but it didn’t matter. She went on :

‘I offered (to try him, you know) to settle all my money upon him. He wouldn’t listen to it—bless you ! So there !’

Then he did not mean to marry her.

‘What are you thinking of, Popplewags ?’

‘Of a strange tale, which reminds me of your engagement.’

‘Ah ! Tell it, Poppy.’

‘A lady—of about your age—rich and independent—was engaged to marry a man of about the captain’s age and circumstances.’

‘There ! I told you !’ exclaimed Mrs. Bodkin triumphantly. ‘It’s nothing out of the way ! People marry at my age every day, I tell you !’

‘Yes, but this man was not what he pretended to be. He was an impostor—a thief, and the companion of thieves. One



day he accidentally dropped a letter, which, being found, betrayed him. This is it. Would you like to read it ?

She glanced at the handwriting ; and a great trembling fell upon her. She gasped for breath, and cried, ' Go home ! go home ! I'm not well ! Go home, I tell you !'

When we reached the house, she was white and shivering ; and she tottered as she went along the hall. I was frightened. I helped her to a chair, and made her drink a glass of wine. When she was better, she asked to see the letter again.

' Perhaps he has done it to frighten me ; to play me a little trick,' she said.

' No, no ; he was a great deal too upset at the loss of his letter, for that !' I replied.

' Perhaps he and a friend *pretend* to be two thieves, and write as if they were (just for fun, you know) !'

Poor old woman ! How loath she was to give up the idea of being a bride !

' Oh ! " perhaps—perhaps !" ' I pettishly exclaimed. ' And "*perhaps*" he has no wife (and " kids ") ! "*Perhaps*" he is a most estimable and virtuous character, and so



devoted to you that he will risk committing bigamy for the sake of marrying you! But no—he does not intend that! Of course, that is why he refused a settlement!

‘Popplewags! Popplewags!’ moaned poor Mrs. Bodkin, ‘I am very ill! Take me to bed! Take me to bed!’

She was again trembling violently, and as white as a sheet. With Nancy’s help, I got her to bed at last; and after a while she closed her eyes and appeared to be sleeping.

Then Nancy drew me mysteriously from the room, and said, ‘Please, miss, Joey’s gone.’

‘Gone?’

‘Runned away, miss. He says the gentleman isn’t going to make him an admiral; and so he’ll go to London, and go aboard a ship all of hisself, and rise to be an admiral some day. And he’s unharnessed Bel, and put him in his stall, and runned away.’

Yes; and on searching for my purse (which providentially had contained only ten or twelve shillings), I found that that, too, had ‘runned away!’ Oh, faithless Joey!

‘Well, Nancy, what is to be done? I



can't do the stable-work; nor can you. Do go into the town, and get a boy who understands something about stable-work.'

When she was gone, I sat at the open window with my work in my lap, and hoped to be refreshed by the sight of my friends; but they were not in the garden; they no longer worked much in it now. Then I drew from my pocket my last budget from home, enclosing letters from Georgie and Mary. How I yearned to see them all again! But alas! there seemed little prospect of it now; for I felt sure that Mrs. Bodkin would never marry the captain; and unless she did, I was bound by my vow to stay with her till the end of the three months. And even when those three months came to an end, should I, I asked myself, wish to leave Mrs. Bodkin? She was, after her fashion, very kind to me, and I began to feel for her a sort of pitying interest. Then I had conceived for my gentle neighbours a great amount of affection, and they returned it, and would miss me if I left. Even for the four cats I had a decided regard. They followed me along the garden path, to and



fro, to and fro, with their tails bolt upright. If I stopped, they rubbed against me: if I sat down, one or the other would jump into my lap, and nestle there, purring loudly. One of them—Miss Sarah's that was—had been ill with a severe cold; his throat had swollen, and he had been unable to swallow for two days. I had nursed him, day and night; and when at last he had been able to lick drops of beef-tea from the tip of my finger, I had positively shed tears of joy!

Whilst thinking over all this, time slipped away; and at last Nancy came back.

'Have you found a boy?' I asked.

'Yes—leastways, miss——' she began.

'When is he coming?' I demanded.

'Perhaps you won't like him, miss; but he's all I could get,' said Nancy, speaking as though I had sent her out for meat, or fish, and she had only been able to procure some of inferior quality. 'He's in the 'all, miss.'

I ran down eagerly to see the boy. Heavens! He was as black as a coal! His cocoa-nut shaped head was encased in the thickest black wool. His lips projected beyond his nose. His teeth grinned forth



horribly when he tried to assume an ingratiating smile. He spoke in thick guttural tones.

However, as nothing better was to be had, I gulped down the insuperable objection that I have to all black people, and took him to the stable, where I found him very handy indeed.

But if ever an imp of Satan was clad in human (or rather, imp-like) form, that imp was. He was as full of tricks as a monkey, and as irrepressible. As soon as my back was turned, dancing hideous, impish dances, standing on his head, turning somersaults, tying kettles to the cats' tails, putting slugs into the saucepans ; in short, making Nancy's life a burden to her.



## CHAPTER IX.

WHEN I next went to Mrs. Bodkin, I found her more comfortable; so, not wishing to upset her, I said nothing about Joey's flight, or the advent of the black imp. As she was quiet and drowsy, I left her to sleep.

Night came on; and instead of going to bed, I lay down on the sofa in her room, in my dressing-gown. A night-light in a basin threw a very faint gleam around the bed, so that I could see the moment Mrs. Bodkin awoke. But she slept on; and at last, tired as I was, I dozed off, though I had not meant to do so.

I had slept some time, when I was suddenly woke by the sound of a scream, in the room, from the bed; another, and another.



‘Help! help! Robbers! thieves! Murder!’

Mrs. Bodkin was struggling in the grasp of a man whose face was covered with black crape. He saw that I was awake, and called out, ‘Jim! Hallo! Here!’ I heard foot-steps coming up the stairs, and knew that his companion was coming to his aid. With desperate energy I bolted and locked the door, and flung the key into a corner of the room. Then, seizing the poker, I dealt a heavy blow at the man’s legs. He fell, and, catching hold of me, tried to drag me down; but I this time delivered my blow upon his head, and he fell back like a stone, dropping from his hand a glittering knife, the sight of which had nerved my arm to strike that blow.

He fell, stunned. Then I pulled the crape from his face, and, as I had expected, beheld the features of—Captain Montague Delamere!

‘The captain!’ gasped Mrs. Bodkin, trembling exceedingly.

I heard his accomplice make his escape from the house, and, opening the window with much fear and trembling, listened, as well as the loud beating of my heart would



allow me, to the sound of his retreating footsteps, faint, faint, fainter, till they ceased.

We were in a terrible predicament. What was to be done? The man began to recover. Should we lock him into the room? or should we allow him to escape? He moaned feebly, opened his eyes, and tried to get up. I approached with the poker.

‘Let me go! let me go! I have a wife—and children! For the love of mercy let me go!’ he moaned.

‘Very well,’ I said. ‘Drag yourself out of the room as soon as I unlock the door; and slide downstairs as best you can; and go!’

He obeyed. As he moved, I saw that there was blood on the carpet, and that his hand was fearfully gashed by the large open clasp-knife, which still lay upon the floor. He managed to get out of the room, and downstairs, groaning all the time; then he crawled feebly away out of the house, and disappeared.

Nancy, who had been roused by the noise, came trembling in, and went with us downstairs to the front door. On examining it,



we found that the lock had been opened from outside, by a key, no doubt, made in imitation of the one so obligingly lent him by Joey. On the inside, the door must have been unbolted and unchained by some one—of course the black imp. Nancy was positive that she had bolted and chained the door before going to bed.

Day began to break. Morning came. Work-people began to go to their work. Mrs. Bodkin lay with her eyes closed, and I thought she slept; so I did not disturb her, for she needed rest so greatly. I would not even allow Nancy to arrange the room, or efface the evidences of the late fray. But, for myself, I felt that I could not rest—my brain was too over-wrought; so I went into the kitchen to help Nancy to prepare breakfast. I was still there, when we were both horrified by hearing a succession of piercing screams from Mrs. Bodkin. I rushed upstairs, and found her sitting upright in bed, clinging to one of the bed-posts, her eyes starting from her head, her face livid with terror; while, facing her, at the foot of the bed, was the black boy.



‘Oh! Devil, *don't* take me away! I know I've been a very wicked old woman! But I'll repent! I'll reform! I'll leave all my money to Popplewags; and she's a good girl, and will make a good use of it. I will—indeed I will!’

I seized the black imp by his shoulders, and turned him out of the room; then I put my arms around the poor helpless old woman, and tried to soothe her.

‘What was it? what was it?’ she shudderingly asked, clinging tightly to me, her teeth chattering with terror.

‘Only a black boy, who has come here to mind the donkey. Joey has run away. Now lie down, and try to sleep.’

She did not notice what I said about Joey. She pleaded, ‘You won't leave me, love?’

‘No, I won't leave you. I will sit beside you as long as you like.’

‘Popplewags, dear, you are a *good* woman. I wish *I* had been a good woman! I wish it now—I do indeed!’

‘Try to, then. You can, if you like.’

She was silent a good while, and appeared



to be sleeping ; but she opened her eyes, and said :

‘Love, before the captain came here, I meant to leave you all my money.’

‘I am glad you did not,’ I exclaimed.

‘Why, my dearie ?’

‘Because you ought to leave it to your grand-nephew. Why not ?’

‘I used to think his mother (who was a melanjering thing, my dear) brought him up to think he had a right to it ; so I made up my mind to disappoint him, you know.’

‘But do you think he *wished* for your death, in order that he might have your money ?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps. Don’t see why he shouldn’t. He has never seen me in his life, bless you !’

‘What sort of person is he ?’

‘He’s a scholar, they say, and poor—*very* poor. A curate, and writes, and starved himself (so they told me) to keep his mother (the melanjering thing !); and kept her to live with him till twelve months ago, when she died, bless you ! and without ever seeing a penny of my money ! And she was eating



her heart out to get it; for it's a deal of money by this time. It's been lying at compound interest for—oh, *ever* so long! Oh yes, it's a *deal* of money!

'He must be a good man. Leave your money to him—do!'

'No, my dearie; I shall leave it to you. I've never been fond of anybody in my life till I met you—except once—ah, yes! and he—it was *that* made me hard and cruel.'

'Leave it to him. You won't be happy on your death-bed if you leave it to me.'

'No, I won't. I love you, and you saved my life, Popplewags. By-the-bye, that's not your name. What is your name, dear?'

'Lucy Seymour.'

'Lucy Seymour—Lucy Seymour,' I heard her whispering to herself. 'I shan't forget it.'

Presently she said:

'Those poor things next door—how I wish I could do them some good! They have been a comfort to you, haven't they, Lucy?'

'Indeed they have.'

'I wish I could undo all the trouble I gave them! I don't mind saying that to



you, Lucy, my child ; you have made me feel as I felt—ah, dearie me !—such a many, many years ago !

‘They are very, *very* poor—and so delicate,’ I said. ‘Leave *them* something.’

‘So I will. Now, my dearest love, I think I can sleep.’

The next day Mrs. Bodkin seemed wonderfully well, considering all things ; but when she tried to get up, she was unable to do so, and confessed to feeling very weak indeed. I sat in her room working, while she dozed, and had just fallen into a home reverie, when I was startled by a thundering sound of hoofs in the garden, and, looking from the window, I saw the black imp flying for his life before Beelzebub, who had broken loose, and was giving chase. Ere long, the brute had caught the poor imp by the seat of his trousers, and was shaking him violently. I flew to the rescue with a stout cudgel, and saved the poor black imp, who at once bolted from the house, declaring that ‘he wouldn’t stop no longer to be ate up alive !’

‘Miss,’ said Nancy, ‘shall I run for William Jackson to catch Bel? He can do any-



thing with him, and wants to buy him. Do'ee persuade missis to sell him—do'ee, miss! I can't abide him!

So when William Jackson came, I gave him permission to take away Beelzebub, and promised to persuade Mrs. Bodkin to part with him; a promise which I had no difficulty in redeeming, as she had kept him chiefly for the sake of tormenting Joey.

A few days later, Mrs. Bodkin was well enough to come downstairs; but her illness had changed her much. A certain sweetness had come over her, most unlike her former self. Save that now and again a little bit of the old spirit would break out, one would not have believed she was the same person. I attributed the change in a great measure to the affection the poor, friendless old creature had conceived for me. She had evidently gone through some bitter disappointment in early life, which had soured her temper, and made her distrust all the world. It was a good thing for her that I had come, I thought.

One morning I was reading the paper aloud to her, when a sharp rap on the hall-



door made me cry out, 'A telegram!' and a dreadful feeling of apprehension seized upon me, as I thought of my dear absent ones. The telegram was from the family with whom Mary was living, and ran thus :

'Come at once. Your sister is ill, and wants you.'

In less than half an hour, I was rushing along the road towards the railway-station ; for I would not wait till a cab could be sent for.

Mrs. Bodkin was frantic. She held me tightly in her arms, and would hardly let me go.

'You'll come back? My child! my Lucy! You'll come back?' she pleaded, her poor old face quivering all over.

'Yes,' I replied ; 'as sure as I live, I will come back, and I will write to you very often. Oh! I *am* so sorry to leave you! I wouldn't have believed how it would trouble me. *Promise* to take care of yourself!'

She made no answer, but as I was hurrying off, pushed a heavy purse of money into my hand. As I left the house, I heard her screaming to Nancy to put on her bonnet



and run after me to the station to see me off.

Oh, the dreadful anxiety of that journey ! But at last, in the evening, I arrived at the house, and, in reply to my agonised question, was told that Mary was 'no worse.'

'I am her sister. Be kind enough to show me to her room,' I said, as I entered the dirty, stuffy house, in the dirty, stuffy street.

The servant showed me up a dingy flight of stairs, and I halted on a landing, thinking my sister's room would be there ; but no, I had to climb higher. There were four doors on the landing I was leaving, and one of them evidently belonged to the nursery ; for a hideous Babel of sounds emanated therefrom, and, the door bursting violently open, a troop of children rushed out, whooping and shouting as loud as they could, and chasing each other upstairs to the next landing. When I reached that, I again paused ; but the servant said, 'Higher, please,' and when we reached the top landing of all, opened a door, and motioned me to go in.

She lay there, so white and still that my



heart gave a great throb, and I cried, 'Mary!' Her eyes met mine, and she tried to raise her poor wasted little hands, but they fell on to the coverlet.

'Oh, my Mary!' I sobbed. 'Is this the end of all our little plans? But you will recover, now that I have come, won't you?'

'I don't think so, dear,' she murmured; 'I think I have gone too low.'

'Have you had plenty of nourishment? —beef-tea, jelly, brandy, champagne?' I asked.

'No, dear; but I have not wanted it,' she replied.

I looked for the bell. There was none. So I went downstairs—yes, even to the kitchen, where I found two servants.

'Can I speak to Mrs. Merrywell?' I asked.

'I will see,' was the answer. 'But won't you come upstairs?'

They did not address me as 'Ma'am' or 'Miss.' It augured badly for the estimation in which they held my poor Mary.

Mrs. Merrywell was a frosty and affected person, as cold as ice where aught but her own interests was concerned.



‘Do you know how very ill my sister is?’ I asked.

‘She appears weak—a sort of low fever, no doubt. I told her a fortnight ago that she ought to go home; but she preferred staying here. She is very self-willed.’

‘I suppose she did not wish to deprive you suddenly of her services,’ I remarked. ‘No doubt she went on hoping to get better, till it was too late to travel.’

‘Perhaps; but really it is dreadfully inconvenient! All my correspondence getting into arrears; my manuscripts uncopied; no one to wash and dress and teach the children, or take them out—for I have only two other servants, and they object to do anything for the children. Oh, it is dreadful! But perhaps, as I do not deduct your sister’s wages while she is ill, you will not object to do her work?’

‘Pardon me; I am here to nurse my sister—to save her, if possible. I shall take her away directly she is able to be moved.’

‘A month’s warning——’

‘I am fortunately able to pay you a month’s wages instead.’



‘Very well.’

I sent for the best doctor in the place, got beef-tea, brandy, quinine, everything I could think of; and, oh joy! my Mary rallied, and at the end of a week was able to be moved into a pretty lodging on the outskirts of the town. There she mended rapidly, and in another fortnight could go for walks, and I thought her fit to travel.

‘Oh, Mary darling!’ I reproachfully said, ‘it was too bad of you to make us all believe you were so very comfortable! How could you!’

‘I thought of our dear mother, and of all the comforts she was able to get while we were away,’ Mary replied.

‘I hope Georgie isn’t deceiving us too,’ I mused. ‘Suppose we drop down upon her unexpectedly on our way home? It lies on the road, you know.’

And so we did. Arrived at the station, we thought it would be a pleasant walk to Georgie’s home; so we asked the way, and set forth. We were trudging along a hot and dusty road, wondering whether we had



come the right way after all; and I was afraid I had done wrong to let Mary walk.

‘I wonder whether we have lost our way,’ said Mary. ‘Let us ask that woman, if we can overtake her. What a rate she goes at! How hot she must be, with that fat baby on her arm, another fat child holding on by her dress, and three more in the perambulator! I suppose they are her own, and she doesn’t mind.’

‘She is tired, though,’ I said, as the woman stopped the perambulator, and, flopping down on to a bank, under the shade of a tree, began fanning herself vigorously with a large cabbage leaf picked up from the road.

We soon reached her, and I was beginning to say, ‘If you please, can you direct us to——’ when she looked up, and in the overheated, dust-begrimed being before me, I recognised Georgie!

‘Oh Georgie! how dreadful!’ Mary exclaimed. ‘You said you were a nursery-governess!’

‘So I was—drat it!’ exclaimed Georgie.

‘Dat it!’ echoed the fat baby, looking



lovingly into Georgie's face, and dabbing a very dirty slobbered hand on to her nose.

Georgie unconcernedly wiped off the slobber, and then mopped the baby's nose with the same handkerchief.

'To think of your coming! Oh, how jolly!' laughed Georgie.

'Ow dolly!' cried the fat baby, driving the muddy point of a parasol into its mouth, and seeming charmed with the flavour.

'Do take these children home; and then come out and have a good talk with us,' I petitioned.

'All right,' said Georgie, shouldering her baby, and grasping the handle of the perambulator.

'Let me wheel it,' I said.

'All right,' said Georgie again.

And so we proceeded, till we came to a butcher's shop, into which she wheeled the perambulator, which she had snatched from my hands.



## CHAPTER X.

A LARGE, jolly-looking butcher was cutting a steak as we entered. The fat baby held out its arms to him, and he received it, administering to its oily cheek a sounding kiss. The other children crowded round him, calling him 'dad.'

My mind was a chaos. So was Mary's.

'What can I serve you with, ladies?' asked the butcher.

'They are not customers,' said Georgie; 'they are my sisters, Mr. Brand.'

'Appy to make their acquaintance, Miss Georgianna,' said Mr. Brand. 'Come into the parlour to see my missis, and have a cup o' tea.'

In a state of complete mental collapse, we



went into the parlour ; and, on being introduced, were shaken hands with by a female megatherium, whose breath was unmistakably perfumed with a choice combination of onions and beer. The 'cup o' tea' was very good, and so was the bread and butter. Then the megatherium good-naturedly proposed, that as we no doubt had plenty of secrets to tell each other, 'as young folks mostly has,' Georgie should accompany us back to the railway-station.

'Oh Georgie !' exclaimed Mary in accents of bitter reproach, as we went along, 'how could you ! How *could* you !'

'“ Could I ” what ?' asked Georgie.

'Pretend you were a nursery-governess !'

'So I was ; but they behaved so abominably, that I wouldn't stop. The servants treated me neither as a lady nor a servant, and always seemed to have a grudge against me. The master and mistress seemed only bent on getting as much work as possible out of me. I hadn't enough to eat ; and the children were insolent. So, hearing that the Brands wanted a nursemaid, and knowing them to be good people, I came to them.



And really I might be worse off, I can tell you !’

‘But why not have gone home ?’ I asked.

‘To poach upon the pittance ? No, indeed, I do right in staying here.’

‘But, Georgie, papa would be very angry if he knew.’

‘I don’t see why. I am kindly treated, well housed and fed, and I have not lowered our name in any way. I did not give them my surname—they only know me as “Miss Georgianna,” and I stipulated that I must never be asked to attend to customers, or cut up the meat.’

There was really so much good sense, as well as right feeling, in all that she said, that in bidding her good-bye, we readily promised to say nothing at home about the butcher’s shop.

Home again. Oh ! the delight of it ! and the joy of seeing, in our dear mother’s renewed health and strength, that she had really profited by our sacrifice.

Of course we gave glowing accounts of our doings ; though Mary had to confess ‘she had



not been very strong lately, and had come home to recruit.'

We had a little evening party, and went out once to dinner, and four times to tea. And wherever we went, we met a certain gentleman—a Mr. Vivian—whom I liked very much, and who seemed to like me very much too ; and all the old ladies in the place talked about it, and gathered together in little knots, and smiled and whispered, and nodded their heads.

But nothing came of it, for he did not ask me to marry him ; so at the end of a fortnight, I prepared to return to Mrs. Bodkin. I was ashamed to think that amidst my pain at parting with my dearly beloved paupers, I yet had room for one little extra pang at the thought that I should never see Mr. Vivian again.

But it so chanced that he, too, was that day leaving the neighbourhood ; so we met on the railway platform, and were put into the same carriage together.

'Are you going far?' he asked.

'Yes,' I sighed.

I did not tell him my destination, nor that



I was in service, because I thought my father and mother might not like it.

I don't know how it came about that the talk fell upon matrimony ; but it did, and he said, with a sigh, that he thought it a most desirable state, and that poverty alone kept him from entering upon it. Something in his manner made me turn scarlet ; perhaps it was even more in his expression than his manner. However, the train stopped just then.

‘My station—good-bye. God bless you!’ he said.

I couldn't help echoing his ‘God bless you!’ and with a heavy heart I lost sight of him, and bade adieu to my one little romance. Then the train went whirling on, and nothing more happened till it arrived at D——.

I had received constant accounts of Mrs. Bodkin's health, both from herself and from the Misses Spraggs, whom I had begged to see to her, and whose overtures she had very graciously received. They reported her as being by no means strong, failing, they



thought; but they said there appeared to be no immediate cause for anxiety.

Mrs. Bodkin had been so impatient for my return, that I half expected she would be at the door to meet me; but she was not, and instead of her was Sarah Spraggs, and behind her, Nancy, her face swollen with crying.

‘What’s the matter? What’s the matter?’ I gasped.

‘A stroke. Oh! and she was so well, miss, and so ’cited at the thought of your coming!’ sobbed Nancy.

‘When did it happen?’ I asked.

‘Last night, miss. I slept in your room, as you told me, and I was woke up by the sound of her tumbling out of bed. I couldn’t lift her, so I put some pillows under her, and ran in to Miss Spraggs, and she came and helped me.’

‘Have you had the doctor?’

‘Yes, miss; he says she’s very bad.’

‘Is she conscious?’

‘Yes, and keeps asking for you,’ said Miss Spraggs; ‘but she speaks very indistinctly.’



I ran upstairs, and entered her room. She knew me, and tried to say 'My Lucy.' I stooped to kiss her, and my tears fell upon her face. A beam of joy passed over hers.

'Yes—yes,' I sobbed, 'I do indeed love you now, though I used not to.'

She smiled—a very soft happy smile, closed her eyes, and soon slept, with my hand between her poor withered helpless ones.

As the days went on, she became more and more collected, and her speech grew more articulate; but we saw that she grew weaker and weaker, and would never rally.

On the fifth day she died, very quietly and painlessly.

The funeral was over, and I was sadly packing my things to return home, wondering what would become of Nancy, and what was to be done with the cats, resolved that if the Misses Spraggs could not afford to keep them, I would adopt them, and would carry them home in four hampers.

But Nancy came to tell me that 'the



lawyer gentleman was going to read the will, and that she and I and the doctor and the Misses Spraggs had to be present ; so I went downstairs, where I found them all assembled. The lawyer was most polite to me, and placed me in the best chair in the room. Then he began to read the will.

After mentioning several minor bequests, such as one hundred pounds to the doctor, and fifty to Nancy, he read that Mrs. Bodkin bequeathed 'to her good friends, Sarah and Lucy Spraggs, the sum of six thousand pounds in the Three per Cents.'

Great as was the amazement of my two friends, it was nothing to mine, when the lawyer read further :

'And to my dear adopted daughter, and faithful friend, Lucy Seymour, I give and bequeath all the remainder of my property, real and personal, including eighty thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. And may an old woman's blessing follow her to the end of her days !'

The air seemed to turn black ; the room spun round. I an heiress ! Oh ! the dear people at home ! And Georgie—dear, brave,



unselfish Georgie! And—yes, even in that moment of utter bewilderment I thought of—Mr. Vivian, and hoped——

But when I was alone in my room, thoughts more sober and chastened came to me. Had I any right to this enormous wealth? I had known poor Mrs. Bodkin for but a short time, after all; and if I had known her ten times as long, had I the right to take away this money from her blood relation, who was a good man, and very poor?

I thought, and thought, but could see it no other way; yet I *could* not easily abandon all my dear, bright, fairy dreams. I was miserably undecided, so I wrote to my dear father for counsel.

And he—good, unworldly soul!—gave his decision in favour of Mrs. Bodkin's nephew; so I sadly told the lawyer to find out that marplot of a man, to transfer the money to him in a proper legal way, and never to mention his name, or the subject, to me. Then, with a heavy heart, I abandoned the legacy, and fell from my high estate of heiress.



I now see that both my father and I were in the wrong. Mrs. Bodkin had a perfect right to do what she liked with her own. She had never seen this nephew, nor induced him to suppose he would ever inherit a farthing from her. She was fond of me, and owed to me the only happy feelings that she had known for many years. I had been faithful to her, and I had saved her life ; I really was much more to her than her unknown, unloved, and unloving nephew. I ought to have respected her wishes and retained her legacy. But my reason had lost its balance ; and as for my dear father, his singular unworldliness of character was often indulged in to the exclusion of common sense, and, certainly in this case, of what was right and fair to poor Mrs. Bodkin.

But the matter was not to be settled so easily, for the nephew declined to accept the gift. But for my father's decision, I think I should have contented myself with having made the effort to be Utopian. His verdict, however, was final ; so, sorely against the grain, I wrote to the lawyer,



reiterating my determination, and pettishly desiring him to trouble me no more, but only to send me the necessary papers for signature.



## CHAPTER XI.

LATE one evening I was sitting in the drawing-room, feeling very lonely for want of my poor old friend, when Nancy announced :

‘ Mr. Vivian.’

Feeling as if a new heaven had opened out before me in compensation for the one I had lost, I rose, and, in the dusk, held out my hand. He took it, but did not press it as he had done at parting.

‘ I have come,’ he began, ‘ in the hope that a personal interview may terminate this vexatious correspondence. I assure you, my dear young lady, Mrs. Bodkin never, either directly or indirectly, led me to suppose that I should inherit one farthing of her wealth. I had not the slightest feeling of affection for



her, and I had every reason to suppose that she had the greatest aversion to me. She had a perfect right to leave her money as she pleased; and I hear that you had the greatest claims upon her affection and gratitude, for you saved her life at the risk of your own.'

'Are *you* the nephew?' I stammered.

He sprang forward.

'Surely I know your voice!' he cried, in altered tones. 'Is it possible? Are you the Miss Seymour I met at——'

'Of course!'

'Why "of course"? How could I possibly connect the Miss Seymour I knew with Mrs. Bodkin's heiress? I never heard you mention her name!'

I was lost in bewilderment, and could only ejaculate:

'Wonderful! wonderful!'

'But surely Mrs. Bodkin must have mentioned my name to you?'

'Never. She only spoke of you as her grand-nephew.'

'But the lawyer—Selwyn?'

'I only told him to find out Mrs. Bodkin's grand-nephew—a curate—and to make over



the money to him. I—yes, I confess—I *was* sorry to give it up, and wished with all my heart that Mrs. Bodkin had never had a relation in the world.'

Mr. Vivian had again shaken hands with me (warmly this time) on discovering my identity, and had not released my hand. As I went on, he detained it with a very firm grasp.

'Of course you did,' he said.

'But I don't *now*!' I eagerly exclaimed. 'At least—at least——' I felt horribly confused. Then, with an effort, I added: 'And so "poverty" need no longer keep you from marrying.'

He seemed lost in thought.

I continued:

'And now you will take the money, won't you? For I give it up *now* with great, *great* pleasure!'

'I will take it—or, rather, help to share it—on one condition only.'

'And that is——'

'That you become my wife.'

And so I kept my money and my happiness too; for, after all, he would not have it



settled upon him, saying that what was mine would be his, and his mine.

He went to Grangely, and I promised to follow in a week. He was to keep the fact of our betrothal and of his own identity a profound secret till after my arrival at home. The next thing I did was to go and see Georgie, whom I found romping about with the young butchers and butcheresses, as happy as a queen. Great was her astonishment when I told her the wonderful news; and as great was the dismay of the good megatherium on hearing that I had come to take Georgie home.

‘A month’s wages? No, indeed! That, nor fifty times that, wouldn’t pay me for losing her! The children thrives with her, and doats upon her; and I always said to Brand, I did—“Miss Georgianna’s a lady, born and bred—a *real* lady, and none of your half-and-half.” And so my words has come true. And I always kept my word with you about cutting up the meat and serving in the shop—didn’t I, Miss Georgianna?’

‘Yes, indeed, Mrs. Brand,’ replied Georgie.



‘You are a woman of your word, and you have been very kind to me ; and I am very sorry to leave you, for I have been very happy here.’

But ‘good-bye’ was said at last, and Georgie went back with me to Grove House. Then began a grand packing-up ; and after that, we were kept waiting a few days, while two goodly iron cages were being made. For what ? For the four cats, which I had not the heart to abandon, as I was fond of every one of them. Two cats were to be in each cage, and we meant to have a whole compartment of the railway carriage to ourselves for their accommodation. This was my first extravagance—the first-fruits of Mrs. Bodkin’s gift. Neither had I the heart to leave Nancy, who was overjoyed at going with us. I should have liked to take my dear friends with me also, as they did not mean to stay at B——, but their plans were as yet undecided.

It was the evening of the day before our departure. Every box was corded, every label affixed. Only two large travelling-bags remained, empty and wide open, to receive



things which could not be packed till the next morning.

There was a ring at the bell, and Nancy came in, on the broad grin, to say that Joey had come back and wanted to see me.

‘Joey! Good gracious!’ I exclaimed. ‘Well, let him come in.’

And that remarkable orphan entered the room.

‘What do you want, Joey?’ I asked, with more promptitude than politeness.

‘I wadt to be a bage.’

‘A page? Why, only the other day you wanted to be an admiral.’

‘I doad wadt to be a ’adbiral doe bore. I wadt to be a bage,’ sniffed Joey.

‘But why have you changed your mind about being an admiral, Joey?’

‘Whed I rud away from bissis, I meadt to go to Luddud, ad I lost by way, ad got to a blace where there was boats, and I wedt out id wud for a bunth ad didn’t like it, for I wobbited dreadful, ad so I doad wadt to be a ’adbiral doe bore. I wadt to be a bage. Ad so after a bit I rud away frob theb, ad cub back, ad they said as ’ow bissis was dead ad



you'd got all her buddy, ad she'd gave sub to the Biss Spraggseses. Ad so I thought praps she'd left *be* a little summat, ad if dot I'd like to be your bage, ad wear a livry, ad 'ave lots of grub.' (Sniff.)

'I couldn't think of it, Joey. Have you no friends or relations anywhere ?'

'Doe, biss, I'b a orphad.'

'Then I'm afraid you must go back to the workhouse, Joey. You were always longing to be there, you know ; and I am quite sure your nose *would* blow, if you tried.'

Joey raised one long and despairing howl, and then fled from the house. I heard afterwards that he did return to the workhouse ; but what eventually became of him I never learnt.

The next evening we arrived safely at home, cats and all ; and then quite a little drama was performed.

Our dear unsuspecting mother said, 'I know you will be surprised to hear that Mr. Vivian is staying with the Mertons again, Lucy dear. I suppose Jane is the attraction ; but really, I *did* think he liked *you* very much, my love.'



‘I thought so too, mother dear,’ was my reply.

‘He promised to come in this evening, to bring me a cutting of a new geranium. You won’t be too tired to see him, will you?’

‘No, mamma, I dare say I shall be able to keep awake,’ I said, with a sly glance at Georgie, who was in the secret.

Mr. Vivian came in at tea-time, and before long I introduced the subject of my supposed dear departed legacy, and of ‘Mrs. Bodkin’s nephew.

Little Kitty exclaimed, with a deep sigh, ‘Oh dear! what a pity he was ever born!’

‘It *does* seem a pity,’ sighed our mother, in her turn.

‘If he were to die, I wonder whether he would have the grace to leave you his money?’ speculated Mary.

‘It is to be hoped he is delicate, and won’t live long,’ was Georgie’s cheerful aspiration, with a comical glance towards Mr. Vivian.

‘Don’t let us be worldly, dears,’ said the good father. ‘Lucy has done what is right. It has been a great sacrifice to her; for she knows how we have struggled to keep soul



and body together, and *shall* have to for the rest of our lives.'

'Why,' said Kitty, 'even when Lucy was "going after her place" (as they say), she hadn't a decent thing to wear! Do you remember, Lucy?'

'Indeed I do. Our mother's dress, lengthened by Georgie, with thread that had done service in another garment. The thread broke, and during the whole of my interview with Mrs. Bodkin, I was in mortal terror lest it should come down bodily. In the hall, before leaving the house, I reefed it up with pins, which I abstracted at random from various parts of my attire. What with Georgie's sewing, and Mary's and Kitty's pinning together, I had an anxious time of it.'

'And for it all to end in this!' ejaculated our mother in mournful accents.

I had not the heart to continue the deception. 'It has *not* ended in this!' I cried. 'The nephew is a poor, foolish fellow! He won't take the legacy!'

'But he means to have an equivalent,' put in Mr. Vivian, 'and one of far greater value to him than the poor legacy!'



Silence — utter and astonished silence — ensued. A dim glimmering of the truth was dawning in the parental minds. Mr. Vivian continued.

‘I am the nephew. When I knew your daughter here, I should have liked to ask you to give her to me. I was too poor ; so I went away, meaning to forget that I had ever known her. Will you give her to me now ?’

And so it ended.

Georgie never married her nobleman ; partly because she never had the chance, partly because she fell in love with a young doctor who came to settle at Grangely.

Mary married papa’s curate (he could afford one now).

Kitty is not yet married, but we think——

We don’t live in four adjoining houses ; neither do we have sirloin of beef, etc., every day ; but the girls (upon whom Mr. Vivian made me settle handsome dowries), live within an easy walk of the dear old people ; while my husband is Rector of Ratley, only three miles off.

The Misses Spraggs are happily settled



in a very pretty cottage in the neighbourhood.

The cats are flourishing. Every one is as happy as the day is long.

And that is all.

THE END.







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